



ESSE-8: LONDON 2006

29 August – 2 September 2006

S36. Academic Discourse: Language Variation across Written and Spoken Genres

Tuesday 29 August: 4.30-6.30pm

Convenor: Marina Bondi (University of Modena and Reggio Emilia)

Email: mbondi@unimo.it

Co-convenor: John M. Swales (University of Michigan)

Email: jmswales@umich.edu

The seminar explores the ways in which the investigation of specialized corpora enables us to study language variation across written and spoken genres. Specific attention will be paid to corpora of spoken academic discourse (e.g. MICASE, BASE etc.), as well as to comparative studies, in an attempt to answer questions such as: Is it true that academic speech is “contingent” while academic writing is “empirical”? How far are they both interactive? What is the role of formulaic expressions in these two modes? What is the role of reflexivity? How do evaluative language features vary? Is humor an important distinguishing variable?

“They have their words yeah” - the lexis of spoken and written academic discourse

Paul Thompson (University of Reading)

Using the BASE corpus, this paper examines the vocabulary of British academic lectures in terms of individual word frequency information and the uses of adjustable complex expressions, and compares these with findings from investigations of written academic discourse (Coxhead 2000; Hyland and Tse forthcoming). The comparison highlights the relative importance of highly frequent lexis in the spoken data and also the different interactional features employed in spoken discourse, with a tendency for lecturers to construct a relationship of reduced power differential, and thus of decreased threat to face.

Recontextualization and reference to other texts: citation practices in spoken academic discourse.

Julia Bamford (University of Rome ‘La Sapienza’)

The recontextualization involved in taking information from a written source and talking about it in a lecture is part of a process of genre chaining where the same content is produced in a variety of genres starting, for example, as a lab report, conference paper, research article and ending up as a reference in a lecture. A process of selection takes place where the speaker typically talks about one aspect of the written text through

summarization and simplification of a complex argument - a frequently occurring discursive feature in the corpus. The paper will focus on reference as citation, limited to reference to a written text. Using various corpora of lectures (Micase, a small corpus collected at the university of Siena and the European University Institute) it will look at the reporting frame, the relationship of the embedded segment to the wording of the source text and the 'production format'

Interaction in academic lectures vs. written text materials: the case of questions

Belinda Crawford Camiciottoli (University of Florence)

Questions are a key interactional feature of both spoken and written instructional discourse. This study aims to shed light on how different communicative modes (spoken vs. written) and interactional settings (lecturer-student, or 'real' vs. writer-reader, or 'virtual') may influence the use of questions. Using corpus methodology and follow-up qualitative techniques, a comparative analysis of spoken lectures and written text materials (both print and online) from the same discipline revealed that questions were slightly more frequent in the latter, while there was marked variation in their form and function across the two corpora. Moreover, the written materials contained linguistic devices typically associated with face-to-face interaction. Speech-like features were particularly prominent in the online component, suggesting a trend towards hybridity in this new written instructional media.

On the Subject of Using: Participial Adverbial Clauses in Academic Discourse

Markéta Malá (Charles University, Prague)

Participial adverbial clauses are considered as a means of condensation in academic discourse. The paper focuses on the question whether the absence of the subject in these clauses acts as a constraint on minimization. While grammars and style manuals generally require that the unexpressed subject should be controlled by the matrix clause subject, it seems that the lack of 'attachment' does not always hinder comprehension. This may be due to a shift in function (disjuncts, subjuncts or near-conjuncts) or in word class (conjunctions, prepositions) of the participial adjunct. These participial constructions are often formulaic, particularly in spoken academic discourse.

Snapshots of science in progress: a look at academia through the lens of calls for papers

Sara Gesuato (University of Padova)

This paper examines the structure of eighty calls for papers in biology, computing, history and linguistics. The data shows that the central function of the texts (requesting contributions) is realized through an inconspicuous move, supported by prominent informative, regulatory, promotional and argumentative sub-moves. Given that all texts share moves with one another, their moves occur in preferred sequences, no move is common to all texts, and some are peculiar to single texts, calls for papers can be said to instantiate a prototypical textual category, with central members reproducing a recognizable text type, and peripheral ones creatively innovating the genre.

Crossing the Divide: Academic Discourse in Translation

Karen Bennett (University of Lisbon)

English academic discourse, which emerged in the 17th century as a vehicle for the new rationalist/scientific paradigm, is now the prestige discourse of modernity, and mastery of it is essential for success in many walks of life. However, its hegemonic status in the world today means that other knowledges are rendered invisible, or have been swallowed up in a process of “epistemicide”, which operates above all through the practice of translation. This paper focuses upon the Portuguese discourse of the humanities as an alternative way of configuring knowledge and examines some of the problems involved in transferring incompatible worldviews across the language divide.