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**Donatella Montini\***

**Rita Salvi, Janet Bowker (eds.), *The Dissemination of Contemporary Knowledge in English. Genres, discourse strategies and professional practices*, Bern, Peter Lang, 2015.**

Over the past few decades the role played by language in our society has gone through marked changes: we live in a world of “digital democracy”, and new forms, mostly visual and iconic, as well as new technologies are now used to convey communication. Indeed, such forms presuppose an interactive conception of language: that is, the language used in specific contexts for specific goals, either social or cultural. Discourse, in fact, is to be seen “as a social practice” because the main agents (a speaker and a listener) interact and the speaker’s intention affects and is affected by the recipient’s comprehension (Benveniste, 1959/1990). In Fairclough’s words: “I shall use the term *discourse* to refer to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part. This process includes in addition to the text the *process of production*, of which the text is a product, and the *process of interpretation*, for which the text is a resource” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24).

It is within this conceptual approach to language that *The Dissemination of Contemporary Knowledge in English. Genres, discourse strategies and professional practices* (2015) moves, focused as it is on the creation and spread of knowledge in various contemporary settings. This challenging collection of essays carefully edited by Rita Salvi and Janet Bowker for *Linguistic Insights*, the series published by Peter Lang under the direction of Maurizio Gotti, displays a variety of studies offering insight into the strategies adopted in contemporary society for the spread of knowledge in several settings, and frequently for educational purposes. The essays present a wide range of topics, methodological approaches and analytical frameworks (Critical Discourse Analysis, Conversation Analysis, Narratology), aimed at illustrating strategies of “(re)contextualization, re-conceptualization, trans-mediation and en-textualization”, as Salvi and Bowker point out in their Introduction. Such procedures are the core of a contemporary idea of knowledge trying to cope with

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the gap between popularization and specialization, and addressed to varied audiences, both lay and expert (Kermas, Christiansen, 2013; Salvi, Cheng, 2013).

Indeed, the process of dissemination of contemporary knowledge seems to mirror a process of translation, transforming a source text into a derived text, which is conveyed on behalf of a mediator/translator as a form of re-writing or “enter-knowing”, as an Elizabethan would say with a word which is perfect to encode and convey a precise idea of communication: indeed, the language of “enter-knowing” points out at least two frames of reference, two languages and knowledges at the same time; it mediates between them, and it is essentially dialogical not only in Bakhtin’s metaphorical sense, but also in Mukarovsky’s stricter, linguistic definition of “several or at least two contextures” which “interpenetrate and alternate in dialogical discourse” (Mukarovsky, 1977, pp. 87-88). It partakes simultaneously of the languages and contextures of the speaker, of the addressee and often also of the object of discourse and is, therefore, necessarily heterogeneous and hybrid.

The six essays of the volume display precisely these “virtual encounters” among different settings and agents, by presenting case-studies ranging from legislation to business, from medical articles and institutional reports, from multimodal financial advertising to educational audio-conferenced in-house training sessions. Moreover, all the essays effectively show the need for an integrated approach when the communicative target is a dissemination process, either aiming at popularization or dealing with specialized discourse. In the articles, corpus linguistics is a constant aid used to collect data and analyse style and grammar; such frameworks as Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics or Conversation Analysis are the tools best suited to interpret the data collected.

The first chapter by Rita Salvi, a leading scholar in the analysis of language in intercultural settings, investigates the language of EU legislation about the market in electricity as re-contextualized in the web-sites of the Big Six British suppliers; with the help of quantitative methodologies, Salvi takes into consideration keywords, concordances and collocations, and in a strongly consumer-centred process of translation, she shows how the language of business attributes a major role to idiomatic

expressions and figurative language, in order to persuade the addressee/potential client via a reader-friendly linguistic strategy.

Ersilia Incelli discusses the discourse on water as treated in different domains, such as economics as well as environmental or health issues. Data are collected drawing on four important systems dealing with water-related problems: the United Nations, the World Bank, the Nestlé food corporation and non-governmental organizations. Incelli compares and contrasts multi-national corporate documents versus NGO reports, and in other terms, discusses privatization versus anti-privatization discourses. Considering the clash between opposite views on water, seen either as a commodity or as a human right, Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis provide an eye-opening framework to analyze the data which account for ideological as well as political positions.

Renzo Mocini and Chiara Prospero's chapters draw attention to the style and techniques adopted in the dissemination of medical knowledge. Mocini chooses systemic functional linguistic models to analyse evidential markers in medical journals, "a genre where reference to evidence is of fundamental importance" and where an appropriate use of evidentiality is essential to prove the reliability both of the content and of the author. With corpus-assisted aids (WordSmith Tools) he traces the presence of lexicogrammatical formulae in a corpus formed by articles indexed by the National Library of Medicine's principal database and built with the help of third and fourth year medical students.

Prospero's research investigates annual medical institutional reports on the spread of diseases, basing her analysis on two British and European specific sub-corpora. She combines a quantitative and a qualitative approach and her stylistic analysis focuses on narrative frames and metaphorical language to establish the role of proximal and distal stance: in the British corpus, where the target is both a specialized and a lay addressee, these features show a stronger attempt at gaining the reader's involvement, whereas the EU corpus's audience seems to be formed by experts who focus their interest on procedures and regulations. Prospero's research appropriately gives a further response to Mocini's study on evidentiality, confirming the necessity to align register and style of national institutional documents to EU directives and vocabulary.

The volume is rounded up by two papers focusing on both visual and verbal communication, in an attempt to simplify complex pieces of specialized scientific knowledge and obtain popularization of this kind of discourse. The articles are also another example of how the multimodal approach is currently gaining momentum in discourse analysis, leading to a complex and multi-faceted analysis of media texts. Unsurprisingly the context is pedagogical: Judith Turnbull deals with the divulgation of economic and financial information in the *Education* section of the Bank of England and the European Central Bank websites; Janet Bowker works on a sub-corpus of audio-recorded in-house training sessions.

Turnbull highlights the theoretical background necessary to adopt a multimodal framework which has to deal with text-image relations and functions and then analyses various video types and cartoons addressed to children and young teenagers. This is certainly another example of popularisation of science: nowadays bookshop departments for children provide a wide choice of products aimed at “translating” scientific concepts, difficult and abstract, into intriguing events designed for capturing the inexpert or naïve individual’s attention. As Turnbull points out, cognitive strategies include the use of *definitions, descriptions, exemplifications and reformulations*, along with images and storytelling performed by friendly characters. Again, the educational goal follows the demands of the market and the addressee is also a consumer, whose attention and reaction are manipulated to gain her/his preference.

Bowker’s case-study is placed in a similar pedagogical context, but this time the learners are corporate trainees whose “education” is provided by the employer through strategic internal communications. Conversation analysis and framing theory are used to provide an interpretation of the data, especially directive acts. Directives have a precise direction-of-fit, word-to-world: they express in words what is to happen in the world; and it is the addressee who is expected to bring about the fit, who is to carry out what the speaker asks him to do. In addition to this, directive acts constitute face threats to the negative face of the addressee that is threatened (Taavitsainen, Jucker, 2008). A pragma-linguistic

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analysis of instructions is essential to test the perlocutionary force of communication, and within a corporate training context it is a crucial arena to evaluate “working relationships” and the “employees’ expectations and motivations”.

The authors have succeeded in fulfilling their aims both in content and in form: they have raised the reader’s awareness of different norms of communication; they have provided an interesting overview of a varied scenario on knowledge transfer in intercultural settings, effectively displayed with a number of up-to-date methodological approaches; and, last but not least, the articles have applied and practised the theories adopted by showing systematic and lucid examples of scientific analysis: following the three basic “Rs”, the studies are *rigorous*, *retrievable* and *replicable* investigations, and achieve a metadidactical aim, spreading knowledge themselves.

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