

## Introduction

This volume brings together ten recent papers from an international conference held at the University of Bergamo from 19-21 June 2008 and hosted by CERLIS (Centro di Ricerca sui Linguaggi Specialistici). The conference title – “Trading Identities: Commonality and Individuality in English Academic Discourse” – reflects a converging interest in the role of English as the *lingua franca* of contemporary scholarship, a ‘critical site of engagement’ (Bhatia 2004) for textual interactions both within and beyond disciplinary communities. Most of these contributions are the outcome of a research project on Identity and Culture in English Domain-Specific Discourse (Prot. No. 2005109911) conducted by colleagues at the universities of Bergamo, Turin, Milan, IUSM Rome and Naples Federico II, under the supervision of Maurizio Gotti. The aim of the conference was to explore the role of identity markers in English academic texts, bearing in mind that active participation in a disciplinary community requires a multidimensional discourse expressing the social, professional and institutional allegiances of its members and that scholars signal and interpret such identities by mastering the procedural / ideational knowledge embedded in a variety of specialised genres. The fact that identity is understood largely as compliance with shared norms or *sameness* (Riley 2004, 2006) does not exclude that academic communication is also an expression of self-hood (Fløttum 2004). Researchers word claims and arguments according to their ‘individual style’ (Busch-Lauer 2003), selecting more or less deliberately from a limited range of salient realisations. This inherent dualism means that “culturally recognisable forms do not produce a conformity to rigid prescription but represent boundaries broad enough to allow even the most individual, even eccentric, individuals to engage their colleagues effectively” (Hyland 2008: 144). Even in international settings, language use is seldom if ever culturally neutral (cf. Kuper 1999). Its instantiations are marked both in terms of content and in the choice of linguistic variants employed by actors to meet the communicative needs of a

diverse audience, as native identities are adapted to a common framework of values and shared behaviours. This process is most evident in such domains as academic, technical, scientific and legal communication, where the socialisation / textualisation of knowledge also plays an important cohesive role.

The shift to English as the default medium for disseminating research findings across cultural, geographic and linguistic barriers is inevitably accompanied by textual phenomena that reflect adaptive attitudes and instances of cultural resistance whose investigation can shed light on the textual strategies that convey identity-related cues. The point is how far the international scope of linguistic realisations in domains which are deemed to be inherently intercultural leads to textual reconfigurations that simplify, distort or even remove incongruent cultural and institutional traits, while enhancing social and professional identities. Such cultural-linguistic outcomes are observed in the adaptive processes negotiated through English, which may produce uniformity or conflict but also virtuous strategies allowing the engagement of new actors and social practices (cf. Candlin / Gotti 2004, 2007; Cortese / Duszak 2005; Garzone / Sarangi 2007; Poncini 2007).

Whereas personal identities are rooted in self-perception and subjectivity, collective identities rely more directly on the socio-cognitive processes instrumental to membership of a given grouping of individuals. As theorised by Lave and Wenger (1991), vocational communities coalesce by participating in meaningful social practices that may be independent of their physical location and other affiliations: by adhering to interactional routines sanctioned by their peers, co-workers reinforce their sense of a common purpose and identity. This aspect of specialised communication also underlies the notion of ‘discourse community’ (cf. Swales 1990, 2004) as a network of otherwise unconnected individuals coalescing through the vehicle of language around common interests and/or concerns. In their account of the complex relationship between discourse and identity, Benwell and Stokoe (2006) describe no less than six different contexts of identity – conversational, institutional, narrative, commodified, spatial and virtual –, the implication being that identity is internalised but also ‘acted out’ (cf. Goffman 1981) according to the audience’s expectations and to the benefits available to the speaker/writer. It is an attempt to express in variable proportions what we are, what we think we are and how we want others to see us.

Any investigation of the links between sociocultural identity-

forming factors and textual variation in academic English should of course take into account its increasing use wherever institutional or professional settings evolve in a way that transcends local linguistic, cultural and conceptual standards (Cotterill / Ife 2001; Candlin 2002). In this sense, the hybridisation of discursive practices observed in English-speaking environments tends to spread to smaller languages (cf. Cortese / Riley 2002; Gotti *et al.* 2002; Giannoni 2008) whose semantic, textual, sociopragmatic and even lexicogrammatical constructions are prone to such conforming pressures. Far less is known, however, of their impact on academic English as an expression of identities which, in turn, are becoming increasingly fluid and negotiable (Pavlenko / Blackledge 2003). This special issue offers a contribution in that direction by describing cases of language variation linked to different disciplinary cultures on the basis of work carried out by such authors as Ivanič (1998), Hyland (2000) and Fløttum *et al.* (2006). Apart from the complex intertwining of communicative purposes, textual organisation and wording of individual utterances, it draws attention to the identity-marking function of language in communities of practice which are at the same time – in social constructionist terms – both originators and outcomes of their discourse.

### *Contents of this special issue*

The ten contributions in this volume focus on the linguistic, professional and cultural identity markers characterising academic discourse both in and across disciplines. They investigate the ways in which disciplinary discourse in written academic English exhibits identity in terms of such variables as rhetorical strategy, writer stance, interpersonal engagement, argumentation, generic structure and gender. As Hyland / Bondi (2006: 8) aptly point out, “the term *discipline* might be seen as a shorthand form for the various identities, roles, positions, relationships, reputations, reward systems and other dimension of social practices constructed and expressed through the language in the academy”. Clearly, the different ways in which academic communicative activities and experiences influence linguistic choices vary within disciplines and this is reflected in the microlinguistic analysis of academic discourse offered here.

The articles in Part I deal with research focusing on a single

disciplinary field. The opening paper by KRYSZYNA WARCHAŁ highlights the fact that academic discourse is a complex goal-oriented activity loaded with interpersonal meanings: the author's identity is itself ambiguous as s/he is at the same time a member of the academic discourse community, thus following the conventions established by the community itself, and a researcher aiming at the recognition of his/her knowledge claims. Hence academic communication delicately balances politeness and authority, which in turn call for different rhetorical devices and strategies. The tension resulting from these opposite forces is mitigated by the role assumed by modality and in particular by the auxiliary *should* as a rhetorical tool marking the relationship between author and readers. After a brief survey of the modality types referred to in the interpretation of her findings, Warchał discusses the meanings of *should*, analysing its uses and functions in linguistics research articles. Her findings underline its predominant use as a deontic modal to emphasise the writer's authority. Yet there are also epistemic uses of the modal whenever evidence is called into play to relieve the researcher of responsibility. Sometimes *should* is employed as a quasi-subjunctive for putting forward suggestions, whereas in hypothetical expressions it serves as a politeness device or an attention-grabbing marker. These functions seem to combine the need of linguists to claim authority and win their readership's acceptance.

GIROLAMO TESSUTO focuses on the way legal knowledge is disseminated through disciplinary communities by law scholars. The Introduction section of legal research articles (LRAs) plays a key role in the expression of authorial identity when offering viewpoints and making assertions within the academic community. At the same time, introductions emphasise the promotional function of LRAs tending to *commodification* and *globalization* on the one hand and to authorship on the other. Authorship is signalled in particular by the first-person pronoun *I*, which academics use to present and validate legal knowledge claims contextualised in the existing literature and research framework. The personal pronoun also emphasises the author's role as a researcher and co-occurs with verbal hedges and boosters signalling interactional strategies with the readership. The interaction is framed by a generic structure which underlines metadiscursive textual mapping when authorial reference is signalled by *the author(s)* or *the writer(s)*. The different exploitation of identity markers – authorship, self-reference and the realization of co-text through citations aimed at an author's

academic recognition – is thus explained in terms of interpersonal and metadiscursive strategies.

The role of introductory sections is also explored by LUCIA ABBAMONTE's study of cognitive neuroscience handbooks, whose authors (while complying with the generic structure conventionally established by the academic community) seem to be engaged in interactional communication rather than an impersonal reporting of information. In her diachronic analysis, Abbamonte argues that while the presence of identity markers used to depend on the author's status in the discourse community, nowadays authors seem to favour a more personal style as far as communicative choices are concerned. This difference is expressed by a more affective attitude to ongoing research, despite the presence of generic norms governing the way scientific-disciplinary content should be presented. Nevertheless, a thread of continuity links past and present: in prefaces and introductions, the authors of cognitive neuroscience handbooks emphasise that their work is to be interpreted in the light of current research and involve their readership interactionally by means of discursive-affective features that negotiate knowledge and shape personal research findings.

ULISSE BELOTTI looks at research article Introductions from a different angle, as his analysis deals with unmitigated claims signalling commitment, strong criticism and/or contrast in economics articles by Italian scholars published in English-medium international journals. Such claims constitute a powerful tool for asserting the authors' identity. The findings suggest that the high frequency of unmitigated claims in introductions not only indicates criticism of previous research results and methods but also the fact that authors perceive a minimal risk of reprisal. The forms of criticism identified by Belotti also indicate that certain economic debates are encouraged by the use of critical claims. Unmitigated claims are therefore a manifestation of researcher identity attuned to the academic community's expectations.

Persuasion as an expression of identity is the main focus of MICHELE SALA's article. Sala looks at the argumentative features of research writing by law scholars using English as a *lingua franca*. His results show that native / non-native (NS/NNS) English proficiency and cultural background play a fundamental role in the selection of persuasive strategies. The lower proficiency of NNS writers is reflected in a simpler, more linear argumentative style characterised by textual coherence; this underlines positive and/or neutral knowledge-orientation,

resulting in a more assertive style. On the other hand, the higher proficiency of NSs facilitates the use of rhetorical strategies embracing different views, with a more interactive, personalised approach. The choice of argumentative style also depends on cultural factors: in fact, the NS vs. NNS distinction broadly overlaps with that between common law and civil law experts: the (inquisitorial) civil law tradition highlights the relevance or applicability of a norm and is expressed by positive knowledge-orientation; the (adversarial) common law tradition prefers more interactive strategies depending on the primacy of witness examination and the active role of juries. Sala's analysis thus reveals that the rhetorical divergences in NS/NNS depend on the authors' linguistic proficiency and cultural education.

MICHELA MENGHINI compares a range of discourse features (personal pronouns and keywords) in single- vs. multi-authored articles from English-language sports law journals. Starting from the hypothesis that single authors manifest a more coherent yet tentative identity in their papers while multi-authored articles project a more confident identity, Menghini argues that such a discrepancy is only apparent. In fact, an in-depth analysis reveals that there is no difference in the way authorial and professional identity is constructed in single- vs. multi-authored articles. In both corpora authorial identity results from the interaction between researchers and their readership through the use of inclusive and exclusive strategies based on first-person pronouns and endophoric and exophoric metatextual items. Both corpora show that professional identity is realised through the creation of a language-specific community network based on the negotiations and intersections between individuals and communities.

Identity across different disciplines is dealt with in the Part II of this volume. AMELIA MARIA CAVA and MARCO VENUTI explore the realisation of academic identity in research article abstracts in mathematics and primatology. Their collocational analysis offers evidence that a key feature of the abstract genre is its focus on the research process, with such keywords as *analysis/es*, *data*, *evidence*, *findings*, *investigation/s*, *methods*, *methodology/ies*, *result/s*, etc. strongly co-occurring with words related to procedures, research evaluation and researcher identity. In particular, the collocates and concgrams of the most frequent terms related to researcher identity indicate that authors' linguistic choices are generally designed to enhance the positive evaluation of their claims and, at the same time, to position themselves within their disciplinary community.

DONATELLA MALAVASI and DAVIDE MAZZI examine the construction of identity in the highly institutionalised research article genre, focusing on the fields of economics and marketing. Their quantitative and qualitative analysis investigates how authors present themselves as experts (professional identity), members of academia (academic identity) and affiliates of a distinct community (disciplinary identity). An analysis of a sample of representative keywords shows that although identity may vary from one discipline to another, there are also similarities between economics and marketing. When constructing their respective professional and academic profiles, both economists and marketing scholars present themselves as credible arguers who can master the technicalities of their field – though marketing analysts seem more reader-oriented than economists. By contrast, there is a clear-cut epistemological differentiation in terms of disciplinary identity, with marketing characterised by references to the empirical nature of the discipline while economics contains references to hypothetical reasoning as a constitutive factor of disciplinary culture.

Book review articles are approached by GIULIANA DIANI as an interesting arena for the expression of writer identity in a cross-disciplinary perspective. Her paper explores how and to what extent reviewers involved in the evaluation of academic research manifest themselves and their interaction with the textual voices weaved into a review. Through an analysis of lexico-grammatical categories (personal pronouns, proper nouns and verbs) that signal the interaction between the writer-as-reviewer with the reviewed author, on the one hand, and with the other expert members of the scientific community on the other, the study shows that in linguistics, history and economics the distribution of these features is motivated by discipline-specific practices. An important factor behind such differences, however, is the argumentation conducted by the reviewer as arguer, which reflects the main communicative purposes of such texts.

LARISSA D'ANGELO looks at book reviews from another perspective. Her comparison of reviews written by male and female authors in the field of applied linguistics, economics, legal studies and medicine, focuses on such variables as gender, cultural background, professional status and experience in academic discourse. The linguistic markers considered in the analysis are interactive resources (transitions, frame markers, endophoric markers, evidentials, code glosses) and interactional resources (hedges, boosters, attitude markers, engagement markers, self

mentions). The study suggests that authorial gender does indeed influence academic discourse, though this is less prominent than discrepancies between expert and novice academics, as writing with authority is a skill that can only be learned through years of practice.

The different approaches and methodologies represented by the papers in this special issue of *Linguistica e Filologia* illustrate the complexity of any detailed linguistic description of textual phenomena linked to the expression of identity traits in academic discourse. As a whole, they show that the identity of researchers is shaped not only by the object of their work but, more importantly, by the expertise, language proficiency, argumentative tools, ideologies and epistemologies that enable them to fully participate in their community of practice.

## References

- Benwell, Bethan / Stokoe, Elizabeth, 2006, *Discourse and Identity*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press.
- Bhatia Vijay K., 2004, *Worlds of Written Discourse. A Genre-Based Approach*, London, Continuum.
- Busch-Lauer, Ines-A., 2003, Perspective in Medical Correspondence. In: Ensink, Titus / Sauer, Christoph (eds), *Framing and Perspectivising in Discourse*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins: 191-214.
- Candlin Christopher N. (ed), 2002, *Research and Practice in Professional Discourse*, Hong Kong, City University of Hong Kong Press.
- Candlin, Christopher N. / Gotti, Maurizio (eds), 2004, *Intercultural Discourse in Domain-Specific English*. Special issue of *Textus. English Studies in Italy* 17.
- Candlin, Christopher N. / Gotti, Maurizio (eds), 2007, *Intercultural Aspects of Specialized Communication*, Bern, Peter Lang.
- Cortese, Giuseppina / Riley, Philip (eds), 2002, *Domain-Specific English: Textual Practices across Communities and Classrooms*, Bern, Peter Lang.
- Cortese, Giuseppina / Duszak, Anna (eds), 2005, *Identity, Community, Discourse: English in Intercultural Settings*, Bern, Peter Lang.
- Cotterill, Janet / Ife, Anne (eds), 2001, *Language across Boundaries*, London, BAAL/Continuum.



- Fløttum, Kjersti, 2004, Individual Linguistic Variation and Possibilities for Academic Self-Hood. *Akademisk Prosa* 3: 87-100.
- Fløttum, Kjersti / Dahl, Trine / Kinn, Torodd, 2006, *Academic Voices - Across Languages and Disciplines*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
- Flowerdew, John / Peacock, Matthew (eds), 2001, *Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Garzone, Giuliana / Sarangi, Srikant (eds), 2007, *Discourse, Ideology and Specialized Communication*, Bern, Peter Lang.
- Giannoni, Davide Simone, 2008, Medical Writing at the Periphery: The Case of Italian Journal Editorials. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 7: 97-107.
- Goffman, Erving, 1981, *Forms of Talk*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell.
- Gotti, Maurizio / Heller Dorothee / Dossena, Marina (eds), 2002, *Conflict and Negotiation in Specialized Texts*, Bern, Peter Lang.
- Hyland, Ken, 2000, *Disciplinary Discourses. Social Interaction in Academic Writing*, Harlow, Longman.
- Hyland, Ken, 2008, 'Small Bits of Textual Material': A Discourse Analysis of Swales' Writing. *English for Specific Purposes* 27: 143-160.
- Hyland, Ken / Bondi, Marina (eds), 2006, *Academic Discourse across Disciplines*, Bern, Peter Lang.
- Ivanič, Roz, 1998, *Writing and Identity: The Discoursal Construction of Identity in Academic Writing*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins.
- Kuper, Adam, 1999, *Culture: The Anthropologists' Account*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Lave, Jean / Wenger, Etienne, 1991, *Situated Learning. Legitimate Peripheral Participation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Pavlenko, Aneta / Blackledge, Adrian (eds), 2003, *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters.
- Poncini, Gina, 2007, *Discursive Strategies in Multicultural Business Meetings*, Bern, Peter Lang.
- Riley, Philip, 2004, Multilingual Identities: 'Non, je ne regrette rien'. *Mélanges CRAPEL* 27: 175-199.
- Riley, Philip, 2006, Self-Expression and the Negotiation of Identity in a Foreign Language. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 16: 295-318.
- Swales, John M., 1990, *Genre Analysis. English in Academic and Research Settings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, John M., 2004, *Research Genres. Explorations and Applications*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

