

Linguistics corner

Current medical discourse research

The Linguistic corner aims to publish abstracts of papers related to oral or written medical discourse of interest to the *TWS* readership. Abstracts are numbered consecutively to build into a series that can be saved as a collection. Contributions should be in English but can relate to papers published in other languages. Françoise Salager-Meyer invites you to send abstracts to her at: francoise.sm@gmail.com.

Medical research articles in the comparative perspectives of discipline and language

The traditional conception of scientific discourse as objective and neutral has been refuted in many and different analyses of academic discourse over the last decades. Even medical researchers, often described as the most 'objective' authors, produce articles that are both argumentative and rhetorical.



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course. She is currently leading two large research projects, collaborating nationally and internationally: 'Cultural Identity in Academic Prose' (KIAP) and 'Understanding linguistic complexity in political discourse' (EURLING), and participating in the forming of the new interdisciplinary project 'Climate Change Discourse, Rights, and the Poor'.

Abstract 5

In: Gotti, Maurizio & Salager-Meyer, Françoise (eds.) 2006, *Advances in Medical Discourse Analysis: Written and Oral Contexts*. Bern: Peter Lang

The main focus of this paper is personal and polyphonic expressions as manifested in academic discourse. It is shown in which ways and to what extent medical research articles may differ linguistically and rhetorically from research articles taken from the disciplines of economics and linguistics. As regards the nature of medical articles, isolated from the discipline perspective, the paper also looks

at similarities and differences between articles written in three different languages: English, French and Norwegian.

The reported observations stem from the KIAP project (short for *Cultural Identities in Academic Prose: language versus discipline-specific*) where the key research issue is whether cultural identities may be identified in academic prose, and, if so, whether these identities are language or discipline-specific in nature (www.uib.no/kiap). Studies of various linguistic and rhetorical features have been undertaken, with a point of departure in the hypothesis that discipline is more important than language as regards cultural identities.

In very general terms, the theoretical framework consists of the following orientations (from macro- to micro-level): Our point of departure is the rhetorical perspective on scientific discourse (Prelli 1989); at a more specific level, we take the genre perspective into consideration (Swales 1990; Hyland 2000). However, the main analyses are undertaken at the utterance level, to some extent inspired by the French enunciative approaches (Ducrot 1984); at this micro-level, one of our theoretical perspectives is the theory of linguistic polyphony, as developed in ScaPoLine (Nølke / Fløttum / Norén 2004).

The results show that there is not much direct personal presence and argumentation of the type *we argue* or *in this article we have shown* in medical articles. This does not mean that medical researchers do not argue. There are more subtle formulations which clearly indicate argumentation, for example expressions of polemic negation and concession. However, the quantitative findings reported in this paper leave no doubt that medical discourse in all the three languages studied here is less rhetorically explicit than economics and especially linguistics discourses are. Both personal presence and interaction with the readers are weaker in medical articles. This general observation is supported by the various qualitative studies undertaken.

Answers from 79-character sentence on page 35

- 1) No. *Either* is not wrong, but is not needed.
- 2) Has to be *or*.
- 3) Difficult. Those with *commatit* (and their number is not small) would say that *rarely* should have a comma before and after. If the commas were there, I don't think I would 'edit them out' of a text, but if they weren't there, I wouldn't 'edit them in'. In other words: both are OK. This is OK for a single adverb, but if the modifier were longer, e.g. *in an unexpected 12% of cases*, then you need to separate this adverbial phrase off from the text with something. The choice is with brackets, commas or dashes. Since the 12% were unexpected, you would probably choose dashes here to highlight this. Or you could say *or 2000 mL/h in an unexpected 12% of cases*.