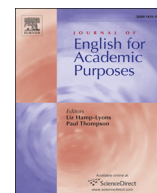




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## Book review

**Disciplinary Identities. Individuality and Community in Academic Discourse, K. Hyland. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (2012). 236 pp., Paperback ISBN 9780521197595, £ 23.80/\$ 29.85; Hardback ISBN 97800521192217, \$61.30/\$ 84.79**

This book presents a study of identity in academic discourse, focusing on the relationship between author identity and disciplinary knowledge. To deal with this theme, Ken Hyland, a most distinguished scholar in the field of academic discourse, relies on his decades-long experience in research, which now he brings to bear on the specific issue of identity construction.

Although in the last few decades the topic of identity in discourse has been widely explored, only in few cases has the focus of research been specifically on the academic domain (one of them being an edited collection by Maurizio Gotti based on a 2008 conference that Hyland openly acknowledges to have been the starting point for this book, although quite strangely the collection does not figure in the References). But certainly this volume is the first book-length attempt at producing a complete and systematic study of identity construction in academic discourse, including a detailed discussion of the methodology to be used in the analysis.

The volume has a carefully organized structure. The first three chapters are essentially theoretical in focus and set the stage for the subsequent chapters which deal with specific aspects and applications. Each of them presents a study focusing on one or more genres – some hardly explored so far, if not in previous research by Hyland himself – and contributes to shedding light on different aspects of identity construction in academic discourse, and to identifying the most suitable tools and procedures to be used in their investigation. Thus every chapter offers a demonstration of how the study of identity can be approached in this domain. In cases where data from the author's previous works are used, they are put in a new perspective, as the main focus is shifted to identity, and the findings are re-interpreted in light of the specific theme under discussion.

The opening chapter presents an extensive discussion of the concept of identity, and various notions associated with it such as that of community, drawing on some of the most authoritative studies produced on this subject not only in linguistics and discourse analysis, but also in sociology, psychology and semiology (e.g., Berger and Luckman, Goffman, Geertz, Giddens, Foucault, Vygotsky, Bakhtin). Thus the view of identity that informs the book is one that rejects all essentialist models in favour of a social constructionist conception, and sees identity as continuously constructed and re-constructed in interactions with others, and therefore as an ongoing project rather than a 'finished' product, multiple rather than single and uniform. Each individual has a personal identity as well as social identities determined by his/her membership of different communities – discipline, class, ethnicity, gender, etc. – which partly overlap and partly are in continuity with each other. A fundamental point in identity construction is the crucial role played by the language people use in social life for interaction, through which they present themselves to others.

The nexus between identity and disciplinary affiliation is illustrated extensively in Chapter 2, where the two key notions of proximity and positioning are introduced, to be subsequently relied on and developed in the rest of the book. Proximity refers to a scholar's academic disciplinary affiliation, which is enacted through competent participation in disciplinary discourses and genres, and manifests itself through "the use of a disciplinary-appropriate system of meanings" (27).

According to Hyland, an important factor in this respect is the selection of topics to be dealt with in one's research, accompanied by the assertion of their novelty, within a web of references to existing knowledge which is partly relied on and at the same time criticised for the aspects that are considered obsolete, objectionable or wrong. Thus, new views can be introduced, but confrontational attitudes are usually avoided and potential conflict is kept under the surface. Positioning is how researchers locate themselves within disciplinary discourses: on the one hand they appropriate the discursive resources of the relevant disciplinary community, sharing values and following conventions, but on the other they represent themselves as individuals with their own specific position, also often incorporating residues of their group membership in other communities (ethnicity, gender, age, geography, etc.).

The third chapter deals with the analytical tools to be used in the discursive investigation of identity. After reviewing the most widely used approaches (Conversation Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Narrative Analysis) critically, the author proposes his own methodological framework, and argues that corpus linguistics – although hardly ever used in identity research so far – provides an analytical perspective that enables the investigator to overcome all the problems characterising

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the other methods considered. Offering the possibility of examining huge quantities of text and identifying regularities and peculiarities in language use, corpus linguistics provides the opportunity to gain awareness not only of the discursive choices preferred by whole academic communities, but also of those that are peculiar to individual scholars. It is thus possible to bring into focus the elements of proximity and positioning in writers' self-representation in texts. The proposal to apply corpus linguistics to identity research is one of the most important contributions of this book. The clarity of the methodological proposal is corroborated by the demonstration of how different procedures, whether corpus-based or corpus-driven, and different tools – frequency lists of words and clusters, concordances, keyness, etc. – can be put to use in this type of research. This is done in the remaining chapters, presenting studies that investigate various aspects of identity construction in academic discourse where corpus evidence is relied on in combination with an eclectic mix of analytical tools drawn on discourse analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, intercultural communication, content analysis. Ethnographic procedures based on interviews and focus groups are also used as a supplementary element to confirm results and orientate their interpretation.

In these chapters the theoretical and methodological approach of the first part of the volume leaves way to more specific analyses, presenting various case studies and focalised discussions with a view to providing a detailed and multi-faceted view of how identity work functions in academic discourse, and of the analytical procedures to be used in investigating it.

The corpus relied on is complex and includes a diversified range of genres – both visible and occluded – that are representative of a broad spectrum of practices performed in the academy: student acknowledgements, prize applications, homepages, research articles, bionotes, books, book reviews and undergraduate reports.

Chapter 4 deals with three less researched 'peripheral' genres – acknowledgements, prize applications and academic homepages – that Hyland defines as "representational" because they involve a direct assertion of identity claims. Acknowledgements appearing in master's dissertations and doctoral theses are investigated through the evaluation of text length and the analysis of move structure. It is thus shown that, although ostensibly aimed at expressing gratitude, these texts are in actual fact geared to project an image of the author as "a competent researcher who is part of a scholarly network and who has first first-class contacts within his/her discipline". The analysis of doctoral prize applications, and more specifically of the applicants' supporting statements, focuses on various linguistic devices expressing evaluation and reveals that this competitive genre – by definition self-aggrandising as it tries to convince judges of the merits of its author's research – features both a promotional and an academic component. The third representational genre examined in this chapter, the academic homepage, differs from the other two genres as it is not totally controlled by the scholar involved, but rather by universities who use researchers' home pages as instruments for institutional branding, as is confirmed by the analysis of the relative prominence of themes and of the visual aspect of the homepage.

The most explicitly self-representative among academic genres, the bio, is investigated in Chapter 5. Freely produced by researchers themselves who can use it to construct the professional persona they prefer, it is usually subject to constraints in terms of maximum length and, in some cases, format as it needs to conform broadly with a pre-set template.

This genre is explored through the computer-based analysis of the theme contents touched upon in each bionote (employment, education, publications, achievements, community service, personal profile) and on the examination of the linguistic processes – relational, material, mental, verbal, behavioural, existential – used to represent each scholar's experience. Findings reveal differences between junior academics and senior scholar researchers as well as across disciplines. Applied linguists tend to attach more importance to scholarly interests and employment stories, representing research as an act of discovery and cognition; engineers give more weight to education and personal details, and depict research activity as work; philosophers consider research interests and publications more significant, and highlight the individualistic ethos in the discipline. Slight differences also emerge between male and female researchers, with the latter emphasising invitations and academic recognition and representing themselves as arguers and discussants.

In Chapter 6 attention turns to the representation of disciplinary proximity in learners' writing, by looking at texts produced by students who have to learn how to handle specialist forms of writing, giving up their own individual identity and adhering to that associated with the relevant discipline. The corpus considered consists of undergraduate students' reports in various disciplines, which are analysed for self-mention comparing them with research articles. Results show that students have four times less propensity to make recourse to self-mention than professional writers, and mostly use it in sections devoted to purpose and methodology, while expert writers tend to employ self-mention more often in argumentative sections, elaborating arguments and expressing views. For students, this constructs an identity typical of learners, who avoid highlighting authorial identity and shun individual stances, a fact which is also probably reinforced by the encouragement to adopt an impersonal style given in textbooks, but also by ideas that are part of each student's cultural identity. The latter issue is thoroughly discussed, highlighting the clash between analytical, individualistic and independent approaches typical of education in Western cultures, and the more collective, conservative and interdependent practices of Eastern societies, which are less likely to encourage students to take a clear and critical stance towards imparted knowledge.

Chapter 7, one of the most interesting in the book, analyses the works of two most distinguished linguists, Deborah Cameron and John Swales, comparatively. A large sample of their works is analysed using a typically corpus driven approach, making recourse to a whole range of corpus linguistic tools – frequencies of lexemes and clusters, keywords, concordance lines – which are discussed in detail.

Findings highlight the different areas of interest of the two linguists, and show how each of them positions her/himself in terms of identity within the broad disciplinary borders of applied linguistics. Cameron's work, characterised by frequent recourse to "it is" constructions aiming to establish views, use of concessive and adversative constructions contributing to a heteroglossic examination and refutation of opposite opinions, and marked sensitivity to readers' understandings shown

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