

Published by LINCOM EUROPA 1999.

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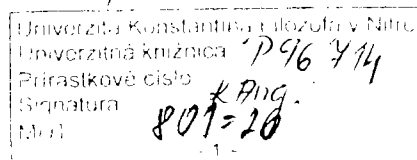
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Printed in E. C.

Die Deutsche Bibliothek - CIP-Einheitsaufnahme

**Discourse in professional contexts** / Ronald Gelyukens & Katja Pelsmaekers, eds. - München ; Newcastle : LINCOM Europa, 1999  
(LINCOM studies in pragmatics ; 03)  
ISBN 3-89586-613-X



Printed on chlorine-free paper

## DISCOURSE IN PROFESSIONAL CONTEXTS

*Ronald Gelyukens and Katja Pelsmaekers (eds.)*

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## **Analysing discourse in professional contexts: An introduction**

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### **1. Why discourse in professional settings is relevant**

The papers in this volume are all concerned with (spoken or written) discourse produced in a professional setting. Most of them are based on presentations given at a workshop on spoken and written discourse in professional contexts held at the University of Antwerp in August 1994 (see also Pelsmaekers & Geluykens 1995 for other contributions). Members from various functional research traditions were welcomed to contribute to the event. Before proceeding to a characterization of what we mean by 'professional discourse' and to an overview of how the various sections in this volume contribute to a better understanding of that concept, we will say a few words about the rationale behind producing this collection.

This is a volume among the rapidly expanding body of work on professional and institutional communication that takes a discourse perspective. Much ground-breaking work was done by Sacks (e.g. 1972) and by scholars in the traditions of conversation analysis and ethnomethodology (see also section 4.1 below). More theoretical and empirical work has found its way to collections such as Boden & Zimmerman (1991), Cedersund (1992), Christie and Martin (1997), Drew and Heritage (1992), Ehlich and Wagner (1995), Engeström and Middleton (1996), Firth (1995), Grimshaw (1994), Gunnarsson, Linell and Nordberg (1994, 1997), Linell and Sarangi (1998), Marková and Foppa (1991), and Wodak and Iedema (1999). A useful bibliography can also be found in Becker-Mrotzek (1992). What makes the present book rather different in concept, however, is that it brings together a wide variety of functional research traditions and methods that each in their own way contribute to a better understanding of social-discursive practice. Cutting right across the spoken-written distinction, and across boundaries between types of professions and institutions, this collection takes text produced in and producing fairly distinctive social structures as its unifying perspective. Further down, we will explain how the relationship between discourse and (this kind of) context has been conceived of.

Existing collections on professional and institutional discourse often concentrate either on one specific type of context (academia, judicial courts, business) or on one specific research tradition (e.g. conversation analysis, critical linguistics, register analysis, etc.), or even on a particular discourse mode. The present collection does none of those things. First of all, the

present papers deal with a variety of professional settings, which often feature in complex configurations: business, government, education, health care, media and politics. Also, together they show a variety of broadly pragmatic research traditions at work, including conversation analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, and systemic-functional linguistics. And finally, as communicating in a professional context most often means dealing with various modes of speaking and writing, this book includes work on such diverse modes as face-to-face interaction, broadcast interviews, group interaction, media writing, and letters.

The renewed interest in professional and institutional communication as a social-discursive practice initially concentrated on talk, as the impetus for that interest was chiefly given by scholars working in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. They have tried "to effectuate a rapprochement with the concerns of classical sociology, and to do so by relating work on talk-in-interaction to those social formations which get referred to as 'social structures'..." (Schegloff 1991: 45; see also Firth 1995: 269-277). The concern with talk may have drawn attention away from the fact that often "these spoken events are intertwined with, preceded and followed by writing practices" (Gunnarson, Linell & Nordberg 1997: 1). These writing practices may require a different approach, but clearly cannot be ignored in the study of professional discourse. Like talk, writing is intrinsically contextualized, which means that understanding and producing written (professional) text means negotiating and determining relevant aspects of (professional) context (see also Auer 1995, Colebrook & McHoul 1996). The present book, therefore, tries to balance contributions on professional talk and writing.

Whereas conversation analysis has recently shown a good deal of interest in how the professional and institutional contexts are being made relevant in spoken discourse, this concern is much less present in the more traditional field of discourse analysis. Exceptions that need to be mentioned are Stubbs (1983), who focuses on interaction in classrooms, and Renkema (1993; see below), who devotes some space to general characteristics of institutional discourse. Critical discourse analysis or social semiotic approaches, on the other hand, have shown a sustained interest in relationships between discourse and power struggles in social structures, including institutions and professional organizations (e.g. van Dijk 1991, 1993, van Leeuwen 1993, Martin 1985, 1991). Organizational communication studies and critical organizational discourse analysis, in turn, have focused on organisations as being coordinated social collectives that are (re)produced and transformed by their members' communication practices. In the latter approach, the insistence is on issues of power and inequality as different groups within organisations have been found to compete at shaping the organisational reality in their own interests (Mumby & Clair 1997: 181-182; see there also for many references). In sum, given the principled interest of discourse analysis in context and the increasing discursive

interaction between complex social structures and individuals, the intensified efforts to analyse these phenomena are gaining an appropriate momentum.

Another vastly expanding field that has been studying professional interaction without necessarily emphasising this aspect is Intercultural Communication. Here we refer to those linguistic studies that are concerned with communication across cultural boundaries, irrespective of whether this involves native speakers or non-native speakers of some particular language(s). A substantial proportion of intercultural communication is indeed professional in nature, and it would be fair to say that a good deal of research on intercultural communication takes this for granted. Specifically, much intercultural communication takes place in a business context, which has led to a considerable amount of studies on intercultural *business* communication (see e.g. Firth 1995, Gudykunst and Kim 1994, Guliver 1979, Hofstede 1991, Oomkes and Thomas 1993, Scollon & Scollon 1994, to name but a few).

Within the present volume the emphasis is not on intercultural communication, but it needs to be stressed that the study of professional discourse in the context of second language learning merits more attention than it is currently receiving in the literature. While a whole new field of interlanguage pragmatics has emerged (see Kasper & Blum-Kulka 1993), the literature in this field as yet pays little specific attention to discourse in professional contexts. While many more pedagogically oriented textbooks on second language learning are becoming increasingly geared towards professional communication, there is an acute shortage of linguistically oriented studies on what could be called professional interlanguage pragmatics. In this volume, a few contributions are made to such studies: the paper by le Pair deals with interlanguage pragmatic phenomena in business discourse, while Jones studies the pragmatic appropriateness of L2-English pharmacy students' service-encounter role-plays as opposed to those of L1 students.

## 2. Professional context and discourse

The term 'professional discourse' is perhaps less defined than it might seem. In this volume, it is first of all meant to be shorthand for discourse in professional and institutional settings, including the objectives the members of professions and institutions might have, their tasks and inferential frames. The evidence for a general set of characteristics common to discourse produced and understood in actual professional and institutional settings is only just emerging. In what follows, therefore, we will address two questions that are more to the point here. First, we need to establish what it is about professional contexts that makes them worthy of special attention. Second, we should try to specify what we can accept as evidence for discourse to be typically professional. These questions will be dealt with in the following sections.

### 2.1. The professional context

The terms institution, organisation and profession are often used interchangeably in discourse studies, even though they all have their own special connotations. The first term is probably the one most often used in studies with sociological roots. In traditional sociology 'institution' is usually taken to refer to structures and activities (like education) with which individuals build a society. 'Profession' is a broader term, emphasising individual members' competence.

Institutional objectives, in the traditional view, reflect the moral values that a society holds. Such an objective could be the transmission of knowledge and skills, maintaining justice, and making laws for instance, which would be entrusted to schools, the judicial and legislative institutions respectively. It is here that the term 'organisation' differs: the objectives of organisations are not necessarily taken to reflect the moral values of a society. In practice, the term is especially used to include those social structures that have economic gain as their primary objective.

In complex societies, the objectives of society and its institutions proliferate and their role becomes more specialised. This is translated into a greater number of tasks that are entrusted to the institutions' representatives. Many of these tasks are in principle aimed at society at large. As a result, the 'general public' experiences varied encounters with institutions, mainly through linguistic communication. The question then arises whether these encounters involve and require a special communicative competence from those within the institutions and those interacting with them.

Renkema (1993) distinguishes three important aspects in the nature of institutions that can be relevant for discourse studies. The first is that institutions and professions attribute specific *roles* to individuals, which have an impact on the individuals' behaviour and what they expect of others. Agar (1985), too, had already used the term 'institutional discourse' to mean discourse in which some of the participants specifically had the roles of professionals embodying authority in their capacity as a representative of a social institution on the one hand and a lay person on the other. Drew and Heritage (1992) use the term in much the same way. Anward (1997) develops a framework for distinguishing different types of institutional discourse on the basis of such roles or 'divisions of saying'. In his view, institutional talk typically consists of utterances in three types of functions: activity talk, topic talk and text talk. Depending on the participant role that is accountable to in terms of the adequacy of these utterances, and the different combinations of values that are possible, a theoretical distinction can be made between teaching and therapy, for instance.

A second characteristic of institutions and professions in complex societies is an increasing *differentiation of tasks among and within them*. (Inter)action with and inside these professional cultures becomes increasingly specialised. This specialisation may be problematic for people who are not members of the professional culture to understand what is going on, but it is certainly also a difficulty for the analyst of discursive practices in these cultures. That is why a research alliance between the analyst and the professional is likely to be beneficial. (Candlin 1997: xiii). So far, however, two general and interrelated aspects of interaction in professional contexts have recently been documented. One has to do with the dynamics of professional discourse: knowledge systems and interactional routines are communicatively formed through *history*, but are also actively recreated and continuously *re-negotiated* (Gunnarsson et al. 1997). Another one is that these discursive practices actually involve much more than just 'language' and have a definite multimodal character. (Goodwin 1994, Goodwin & Goodwin 1997, Iedema & Wodak 1999). Besides linguistic *coding schemes*, professions use the processes of *highlighting* and *graphic representation* to link relevant features of a setting to the activity being performed and to organise and display relevant knowledge respectively (Goodwin & Goodwin 1997). These are basically processes of re-contextualisation, which means that a professionalisation of discourse entails shifts of meaning and materiality away from previous instantiations, and usually towards technological or 'exo-somatic' materialities: e.g. from talk to print, from idea and design to external cognitive artefact (Iedema & Wodak 1999). Meanings are abstracted away from interpersonal and referential specifics, and are subsequently taken for granted. They become background assumptions that continuously redefine practice within the profession (ibid.). Professions also have procedures and conditions under which meaning and information can be re-contextualised. Unless information is given validity or 'evidential status' it is deemed not reportable to clients and (inter)professional colleagues. By a similar token, however, information assumes validity in and through its reportability (Sarangi 1998).

The third and perhaps most studied characteristic of institutions and professions is that they are invested with *power*. Indeed, the ability to see relevant entities in the complexity of reality is not lodged in the individual in society, but is the prerogative of a select group of competent professionals. In other words, the "power to see authoritatively and produce a range of phenomena that are consequential for the organisation of a society is not homogeneously distributed" (Goodwin & Goodwin 1997: 309). Communities of professionals have the power to shape distinct objects and events, while they also determine who can be 'heard' or not in society, and on what conditions statements are to be regarded as 'rational' or not. Patients in a hospital and students at an exam typically have little voice of their own and are often treated as objects in the professional procedures.

This power aspect of professional discourse may raise ethical questions for some analysts (e.g. Goodwin and Goodwin 1997) as to whether they should lend their services to the professions to even amplify their voice and the power they can enforce over those who become objects of their scrutiny. However, one could also argue that an analysis of professional discursive practices has the potential of exposing professionals for what they do and therefore of making them more vulnerable to social contestation and change.

## 2.2. The selection of material

Drew and Heritage (1992: 3-65) have usefully narrowed down the characteristics of institutions into criteria for considering discourse as potentially institutional in the first place. First, one or more of the participants in the language event represent(s) a formal organisation. Drew and Heritage place special emphasis on situations in which professionals interact with lay persons, but we do not want to make that restriction. Interaction between professionals will also be considered, as we assume it is both frequently occurring and potentially reflective of the communicative competence involved. Second, the discourse produced by these participants is taken into consideration in so far as it is task-related. That is to say, the discourse is produced with specific goals in mind that can be related to the larger objectives of the profession or institution in question. It is a crucial aspect that distinguishes professional interaction from ordinary interaction, where the flow of interaction is not necessarily motivated by a pre-determined goal. This feature has repeatedly been found to have repercussions on many levels of the professional discourse.

Physical setting on its own is much too vague an indication for the professionalism of discourse. Indeed, one can easily think of situations in professional settings where people interact non-professionally, as in a casual conversation during the coffee break. However, some would argue that even this kind of talk is professional in that it helps to realise goals that are temporarily shifted to the background (Boden 1994). On the other hand, professional interaction need not be restricted to a professional setting, but could easily take place in someone's private home. This point is even more true for written discourse, at the producing end as well as at the receiving end.

## 2.3. Evidence for the 'professionalism' of discourse

Another question is what the researcher will accept as evidence for the 'professional' character of actual discourse. As has been convincingly argued by Schegloff (e.g. 1991), merely invoking extraneous features such as setting, social structure or pre-determined participant roles does not prove that these are also relevant to the actual language event under consideration. For any actual event, many different dimensions of context could be active (Auer 1995: 6; cf also Halliday's characterisation of context in 1985/89: 12): co-text, setting, roles and goals, common background knowledge relating to other than the previous dimensions, and channel or mode of communication could all be relevant. At any point in the event, more than one dimension of context may be relevant or more than one dimension could be alternatively available. It may not be immediately transparent, therefore, how and which particular discourse forms can be assigned to the contextual frame(s) in play - e.g. that of institutional roles, tasks and inferential frames. In Schegloff's view (1991;1992) this can only be established by demonstrating that participants orient to the context, and by demonstrating that the context is "procedurally consequential", i.e. the context must have "determinate consequences" for the "shape, form, trajectory, content or character of the interaction that the parties conduct" (Schegloff 1991: 53). What has to be shown, therefore, is that the discourse can only be fully understood if reference is made to one or more specific contextual frames (cf. Drew and Heritage 1992: 25). The latter point brings the analyst into focus. Indeed, how can the significance of a turn or sentence properly be analysed if the analyst herself does not have access to the professional inferential frames that are used by at least one of the participants? The more technical and specialised these frames get, and the greater the professional involvement of both parties, the more the analysis requires insight into these frames in much the same ways that professionals from the institution have.

In order to make valid claims about the professionalism of discourse, a third element is needed besides orientation and structural impact. This is a comparative angle. In conversation analysis, procedures of institutional talk are compared to those of a more "basic" mode, i.e. ordinary conversation (Schegloff 1991, Drew & Heritage 1992: 19-21). In the broader view of discourse that we are taking, there may not be such a comparative bench-mark yet. It is not quite clear what could be taken as a 'basic' form for writing, comparable to ordinary conversation, that is, devoid of pre-determined roles, tasks and inferential frames other than those 'naturally' belonging to the participants. For the time being, then, we will have to venture hypotheses about the professionalism of discourse that result from an observed orienting-to that is dynamically consequential in a great many different instances.

For talk, Drew and Heritage (1992: 25-53) have already been able to pinpoint to phenomena that are indexicals of institutionality. These include particular lexical choices (e.g. an institutional speaker's use of "we" to refer to themselves; a preference for calendar time references over subjective time references); aspects of turn design (lexical, syntactic and prosodic selections within a turn that favour cautious, non-committal formulations); aspects of sequence organization (specialized turn-taking systems based on pre-allocation, especially in formal, public settings); aspects of overall structure (ordered phases); finally, emerging social relations (professional cautiousness; interactional asymmetry).

Whereas other approaches to discourse have not yet formulated general characteristics of professional discourse in comparable terms, many have also tried to link aspects of form to specific contexts. Studies within the systemic-functional framework (see section 4.4 below) have motivated many studies on lexico-grammatical choice in specific contexts (see Martin 1992: 508-546 and Eggins 1994: 49-79 for references). Staged structure in task-related language events have been taken up in genre studies (e.g. Bhatia 1993; Swales 1990; Ventola 1987; more references and discussion in Martin 1992: 546-573 and Eggins 1994: 25-48). Finally, Brown & Levinson's (1978/1987) politeness phenomena have been widely studied in all sorts of contexts, including professional ones, and also figure in a few contributions to this volume (Nickerson and le Pair).

### 3. Types of professional discourse

Professional discourse is usually not approached as a whole, for obvious reasons. The area is potentially enormous. Also, in order to come up with recurring patterns and phenomena, it pays to keep as many (professional) variables constant as possible. For heuristic reasons, therefore, various classifications of professional discourse are conceivable. In what follows, we will outline a few dimensions along which a classification could be made.

A rudimentary distinction could be made between oral and written discourse, but it might be sensible to turn to much finer distinctions of mode and analyse it further into possibilities of visual, aural and physical contact, and opportunities for feedback. Face-to-face interaction in an academic setting (a tutoring session) may have more in common with a (written) e-mail correspondence than with a formal lecture event. Another modal aspect involves the degree to which language is constitutive of the institutional action under consideration. In this respect a sermon may have little in common with language that someone uses to accompany a demonstration in the lab. Mode may thus be a very powerful cluster of contextual variables that

need special attention when professionalism is considered. Drew and Heritage (1992) have made modal restrictions one of the criteria for their collection.

Judging from the growing literature on various forms of professional discourse, a more popular way of making distinctions is by type of profession or professional domain (converging with professional objectives, e.g. health care). This is then often combined with task or action type (e.g. counselling). Certain action types may well be professional or institutional in the sense that they are intuitively recognisable in various professional contexts and much less sharply outside those contexts. Counselling, for instance, a type of event in which a professional gives advice or guidance to a client, could be experienced in health care (e.g. AIDS counselling), in the legal system (e.g. divorce counselling) or social security services (e.g. employment counselling). Interprofessional studies of this type of task are, however, much less frequent. Genre, as a concept related to task and its formal consequences, is similarly mostly studied in a particular professional context. A notable exception is Firth (1995), which scrutinises negotiations in different domains such as business, health care, education, government and so forth.

The most fruitful way to categorise the majority of the existing literature would thus be by professional domain. With this in mind we have made a rough classificatory basis for an overview of the recent discourse-oriented literature on professional communication. This overview, which is by no means exhaustive, can be found in Chapter 2.

Drawing on a considerable selection of (over 600) bibliographic items pertaining to the period 1987-1999, we propose the following classification:

- BUSINESS:** including all types of task-related discourse in business, industry and employment;
- MEDICAL:** including doctor-patient interactions, counselling sessions, day-care centre discourse, the language of medicine, (psycho)therapeutic discourse, emergency calls and so on;
- LEGAL:** including courtroom interaction, forensic language, police language;
- MEDIA:** including advertising, broadcasting, interviews, newspaper reports, newsreading, radio talk, journalism;
- POLITICAL:** including interaction with public authorities, political interviews and legislative assembly reports;
- CLASSROOM:** including classroom language, educational writing, teacher-student interaction, tutorials, the language of instruction in general;
- SCIENTIFIC/ACADEMIC:** including technological and academic discourse, the language of science.

Of course, this classification is in no way a statement about observed empirical similarities, but only a heuristic device. It also stands to reason that other professional domains can be located and research on discourse within these contexts may be found. As it stands, however, the majority of sampled research could be made to fit into the categories summed up above. In the case of collections, they usually deal with just one of these domains (e.g. Gibbons 1994 on legal discourse), or make modal restrictions (e.g. Drew and Heritage 1992). Elements of all domains named above except the legal can, in various forms, be found in the present volume.

The boundaries of the categories listed above are admittedly fuzzy, though some domains are more likely to overlap than others. A case in point is academic/scientific discourse on the one hand and classroom discourse on the other. Although they both belong to educational institutions, the literature shows a really diversified interest in (mainly interactive) discourse processes accompanying or constituting teaching and learning in classroom settings on the one hand, and the less interactive, often written discourse forms constituting doing science on the other hand. The boundaries between, say, research on medical discourse and scientific discourse are not always very clear either. The same is true for economics (science) and business. Researchers in the first domains are primarily interested in interaction between professional practitioners and lay persons, while in the academic/science domain, attention is mainly paid to language use for/among peers. Finally, what people say and do in political institutions is often studied through the media, which sometimes makes a classification of work in this area rather difficult. Both politics and media discourse studies primarily address questions of specialist power and naturalised ideology in discourse directed towards the lay public. However, discourse in the media comprises more than political oratory in the narrow sense, and frequently serves other professional interests, such as those of big business or religion, beside those of the media itself.

In the next section we will discuss another aspect of work on professional discourse, viz. the research traditions that are drawn upon to study the object of inquiry. Although in theory these different traditions could also provide us with a classification of work on professional discourse, it is probably not the most fruitful one. In practice, many analysts draw on more than one tradition, and whereas a strict adherence to one tradition may lead to considerable detail in results, it is also bound to leave 'blind spots'.

#### 4. Approaches to (professional) discourse

This volume shows various approaches to discourse at work. Here we will very briefly discuss the traditions and methods drawn upon and the present authors' findings within those frameworks. The organisation of the chapters after this one, however, is by domain.

##### 4.1. Conversation analysis

First of all, certain modes of spoken institutional discourse lend themselves to conversation analysis (CA). This approach goes back to Sacks' (1972) research programme that was designed to investigate the levels of social order as they were revealed in the everyday practice of talking. It focuses on the machinery of conversational turn-taking and on the sequential patterns and structures associated with the management of social activities in conversation (Hutchby & Drew 1995: 183). Thanks to more than two decades of research efforts, CA is "now able to deal comprehensively with the oriented-to rules of turn-taking and has used its focus on turn and the management of turn-exchange to build compelling accounts of structural organizations" in various conversation phenomena such as repair, topic shift, agreement and disagreement (Hutchby & Drew 1995: 183). The aim of CA in institutional settings is, as in 'everyday' settings, to reveal how the mechanics of talk are "the structured, socially organized resources by which participants co-ordinate activities through talking in interaction" (ibidem). Talk is treated as the main vehicle for institutional action, in the sense that institutional organisation and goals in person-to-person interaction are mutually *constructed and sustained*.

In the present volume, Glover uses the analytical apparatus of CA to analyse power distance in a negotiating event. Starting from Hofstede's (1980) observation that collaboration in negotiation differs across cultures, abstractly illustrated by his study of power perception and values regarding authority, Glover investigates how Hofstede's abstract power index is oriented to by the negotiators within an urban planning negotiation meeting. She finds that the unequal membership of participants within the meeting was not very much differentiated in the micro-analysis of the talk produced at the meeting and she relates this to the tendency to minimise inequality in low power distance index cultures. She also concludes that these findings in fact problematise the existence of power-distance in this particular context, as the process of negotiation actually emphasises interdependence. Both parties orient to goals and interests which are similar. In our view, Glover's paper testifies once again to the insight that context, professional or otherwise, conceived of as a static extralinguistic reality, is not necessarily relevant to the language produced in it.

#### 4.2. Interactional sociolinguistics

Another approach relevant to this volume falls under what Schiffrin (1994) labels interactional sociolinguistics. Inspired by Goffman, but obviously also touching on Searle's speech act theory and even, indirectly, on Grice's notion of conversational implicature, le Pair and Nickerson use as their starting point insights from Brown and Levinson's (1978, 1987) model for the analysis of politeness. At the basis of this lies Goffman's notion of face, i.e.

"the public self-image that every member [of a society] wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects:

- (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction, i.e. to freedom of action and freedom from imposition;
- (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or personality (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61).

Crucial to the theory is the concept of face-threatening act (FTA), i.e. a (linguistic, for our purposes) communicative act which inherently threatens the positive and/or the negative face of the speaker or the hearer (or both, for that matter). Many types of speech acts, such as requests, warnings, invitations, and the like, function as FTAs when they are uttered in specific contexts, and the speaker will have to decide, within his/her linguistic repertoire, on the most felicitous formulation or mitigating strategy which fits the level of face threat expressed in the FTA.

While this theory was developed with spoken interaction in mind (and, it should be noted, very much with a cross-cultural perspective in mind), there is no apriori reason why it should not be employed for analysing written discourse in general, and professional written discourse in particular. One particular type of such discourse, viz. the business letter, is ideally suited to this, as it displays interactive characteristics which are similar to spoken language. Most importantly, since letters address a specific reader, one finds a variety of different speech acts in them, and thus a high incidence of potential FTAs.

One of the papers (by le Pair) also includes an interlanguage perspective, as it is partly concerned with the formulation of FTAs in non-native discourse. It thus fits into an on-going tradition within interlanguage pragmatics, which has hitherto devoted a lot of attention to speech acts in general, and in their relevance to linguistic politeness in particular (see, especially, Blum-Kulka et al. 1989). Most of this work, however, is not specifically concerned with professional discourse. The two politeness papers in this volume show, first of all, that Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory can be successfully employed for the analysis of professional

discourse and, secondly, that FTAs in this type of discourse are worth studying from an interlanguage perspective.

**Nickerson** investigates a corpus of business letters written by native speakers of British English for linguistic realisations of positive and negative mitigation strategies. These politeness strategies are related to the social distance and relative distance in power between sender and addressee, and to the subject matter of the letter. For a number of transactional and interpersonal elements in these letters she is able to identify a number of politeness strategies that are characteristic for the rhetoric of British business correspondence.

**le Pair** reports on a research project investigating to what extent the choice of politeness strategies underlying the realisation of requests in Spanish by Spanish native speakers differs from the strategies chosen by Dutch non-native speakers using Spanish as a foreign language. He also tries to determine whether estimations of sociocultural variables such as relative authority of speaker and hearer, the social distance between them and the discourse situation (opposing profession to everyday life) is responsible for observed differences. Adopting data collection methods developed in Blum-Kulka et al. (1989), he finds that, overall, (Dutch background) non-native speakers of Spanish choose realisation patterns that are less face-threatening and on the safer end of the politeness scale. Of the three contextual factors he investigated, his provisional finding is that a lower social distance is the key determining factor in the choice for more direct strategies.

#### 4.3. Critical linguistics

Another tradition that has shown considerable interest in professional and institutional discourse is critical linguistics, including critical discourse analysis. In Fairclough's words it "is not a branch of language study, but an orientation towards language (...) with implications for various branches. It highlights how language conventions and practices are invested with power relations and ideological processes which people are often unaware of" (1992: 7). To that end, critical linguists investigate language behaviour in everyday situations of immediate and actual social relevance: discourse in education, media and other institutions. As in the other traditions that we have glossed here, critical linguistics does not view context variables to be correlated to an autonomous system of language; rather, language and the social are seen as connected to each other through a dialectical relationship. Texts are deconstructed and their underlying meanings made explicit; the object of investigation is discursive strategies which legitimise or 'naturalise' social processes (cf. Wodak 1995: 204-207)



In this volume, the paper by **Jacobs** is much in line with these aims and strategies. He focuses on the function of metapragmatic discourse in a corpus of press releases. Drawing on Bakhtin and his circle's views of language, he shows that the genre's special type of embedded formulations is double-voiced discourse, which serves to mitigate the self-interested quality of the information in press releases and makes it sound more like neutral news reports. Whereas the double-voiced use of metapragmatic discourse is not restricted to press releases, but is a more general feature of everyday language use, in press releases it is fairly central to realising the professional goals of the organisation issuing them.

#### 4.4. Systemic-functional linguistics

A fourth approach to professional discourse seen at work here is systemic-functional linguistics (SFL). In this volume, no less than four contributions partially or substantially draw on this tradition (Berry, Hyatt, Jones and Temmerman). We will therefore outline a few crucial points of this comprehensive theory to serve as a background for interpreting the current papers.

Present work within SFL is mainly based on Halliday (1978 and 1985/1994) and was further expounded in Berry (1977a/1989; 1977b/1991); Butler (1985) traces the origins of the tradition and discusses its further developments and applications. The analysis of context in relation to text is explained in detail and taken further in Martin (1992), while Eggins (1994) provides a highly readable textbook introduction.

The relationship between language and context has always been a primary concern in SFL. Halliday (1978) argues that language is an important semiotic system through which humans express, construct and negotiate social meanings. In any linguistic meaning-making process, three kinds of meaning can be made simultaneously: ideational meaning (further analysed into experiential and logical meaning), interpersonal meaning, and textual meaning. The ideational aspect of meaning has to do with referring to the world outside and inside the language user. Interpersonal meaning establishes and maintains role relationships and expresses attitudes to what is communicated. Textual meaning is related to the organisation of what is communicated as (spoken or written) text: how elements in the text relate to each other and relate to what was communicated before and will come later. This metafunctional diversity of the language system is based on Halliday's perception of three relatively independent system networks on the level of the clause. The Transitivity system (involving processes (verbs), participants (nouns), circumstances (prepositional phrases) etc.) relates to experiential meaning; the system of Mood (involving types of clause structure (declarative, interrogative), degrees of certainty or obligation (modality), use of tags, vocatives, attitudinal words, politeness markers etc.) relates

to interpersonal meaning; the Theme system (patterns of foregrounding and continuity) relates to textual meaning. Together the three system networks represent the meaning potential of a language, from which the language user makes contextually motivated choices.

To explain the relationship between linguistic choice and context, Halliday attributed three key dimensions to context: Field, Tenor, and Mode. Together, these contextual variables are constructed in text as Register. Field stands for the focus of the activity, Tenor refers to participants and role relations, while Mode involves the share and role of language in the event (Halliday 1978, 1985/1989). In Halliday's view, these parameters of situational variation are related to the three metafunctions of language. Field characteristics of the situation activate choices realising experiential meaning (hence choices from the transitivity system), tenor has an impact on choices realising interpersonal meaning (thus from the mood system), and mode is primarily reflected in choices realising textual meaning (from the theme system).

In order to account for the fact that social activity types in a culture often cut across situational variables (like buying and selling things, writing letters, counselling and so forth), Martin (1992: 497-508) introduces the concept of *genre* on another level of context, i.e. the level of culture, which gives purpose and meaning to these recognisable activity types. Genres are characteristically staged (with obligatory and optional steps) and goal-oriented. Long and very complex activities such as business meetings or novels could be seen to belong to a macro-genre, within which it is possible to identify a range of other genres. Finally, in order to account for the fact that genres themselves evolve, tend to live a 'life of their own' and are not used evenly by all social groups, yet another and higher level of context is introduced, that of ideology. Ideology is "a system of coding orientations [that] positions speakers/listeners in such a way that options in genre, register, and language are made selectively available" (Martin 1992: 507). Social power relates to the range of options that are available and how they can be used "for control, submission and negotiation" (ibidem).

In this volume, **Berry** turns to Halliday's metafunctions. She observes that many people in the business context also have intuitions about distinctive components in meaning-making, and that in particular they seem to orient to both making content meaning and maintaining good relationships. The metafunctional distinction into experiential and interpersonal meaning is therefore useful as a starting point, she argues, but the theory may need some refinement, in particular where it specifies how these meaning components are realised. In order to clarify this further, Berry reports on an experiment designed to elicit the views of language users on precisely what counts as suggesting interpersonal meaning in business texts. Whereas she concedes that it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions from this exercise, it has become clear that language users' perceptions do not always coincide with current SFL theory about

what elements convey interpersonal meaning. Her wider conclusion is that much more testing is needed and that empirical evidence may necessitate the redrawing of boundaries within theories. Berry's paper not only shows how SFL can work for professional discourse, but also shows how professional discourse can be viewed as being not just some special case or deviation of ordinary discourse, but a fully valid type of discourse which can serve as input for (testing) a general theory of language.

In theory at least, SFL sees every context of situation as 'specific', and rejects a dichotomy between 'ordinary' and 'specific' language use. As pointed out above, these situations are describable in terms of register variables. In more 'applied' studies, therefore, register often provides a starting point for describing the communicative phenomena at hand. Hyatt uses the field, tenor and mode distinctions to typify the complex situation of broadcast 'antagonistic' political interviews. Rather than offering predictable characteristics referring to static, extra-linguistic context, field, tenor and mode refer to sets of relevant questions that can be asked about context, i.e. questions about the goals, focus, role relationships and communicative medium constraints to which participants orient during the exchanges. Hyatt then goes on to describe the structural organisation of the interviews in his corpus and relates this to the roles and goals of the participants.

Jones' paper deals with discourse in an equally complex situation: that of pharmacy students role-playing service encounters with patients in a communication training course. Rather than focusing on the complexity of the context itself, she singles out one variable that is particularly relevant in Australian communication training at university, viz. the linguistic background of participating students. Confronting role-play performances of students with non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) with those of English speaking backgrounds, she studies the actual generic structures of the service-encounters on a macro- and, where relevant, on a micro-level. As a result, she is able to identify a number of 'problems' the NESB texts display in relation to assumptions communication training courses make, and Pharmacy Practice examination criteria show in particular.

Interaction in a classroom setting is also the theme of Temmerman's contribution, in which systemic and cognitive perspectives are combined. She studies the forms and functions of 'defining' as an event type in Flemish primary school lessons. Drawing on a corpus of 27 recorded lessons in Dutch, she finds that defining occurs both as an activity in its own right, and as part of another activity in passing. She also shows how the asymmetry in classroom talk emerges from these events. Inspired by respectively systemic notions of interpersonal meaning and by the cognitive concept of imagery, she goes on to explain how the form of definitions is influenced by interpersonal and cognitive factors.

### Acknowledgments

We are indebted to Jan Blommaert, Chris Braecke, Hubert Cuyckens, Betty Devriendt, Frans Daems, Dirk Noël, Franciska Van Overberghe, and Luuk Van Waes for their help in refereeing the papers. Thanks are also due to Nicole Gysemberg and Moritz Felix Lück for their help in preparing the manuscript for publication.

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### **Bibliography of Professional Discourse 1987-1999**

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As we have shown in chapter 1, professional discourse has enjoyed a fast-growing interest among analysts in many different disciplines. Whereas many 'classic' studies appeared in the seventies and early eighties, notably in conversation analysis, it is especially during the past decade that discourse analysts have turned so massively to language use in specific institutional and workplace contexts. This explosive activity, however, has mostly been recorded or referred to in single papers or volume introductions, with often legitimate restrictions on approaches. To the best of our knowledge, no interdisciplinary bibliography on professional discourse in general is as yet available in the literature.

As we have argued in the Introduction, there is increasingly good reason to look across the fence of analytic traditions. Rather than thinking that research results from different approaches can simply be added up, we believe that a broadened perspective could help to find a direction for more work within one's own theoretical tenets. That is why we used only broad heuristic categorisations of domain to subdivide the material, as we proposed in the previous chapter. Yet the bibliography is also selective in at least three ways.

First, it is restricted to work appearing from 1987 onwards. Older studies are possibly still very relevant and valuable, but such 'classics' are probably easier retrievable from reference lists in individual papers. We basically omitted them for reasons of space. Newer studies, on the other hand, not so widely cited yet, have been included until 1998 and occasionally 1999, in so far as they were available before this bibliography went into print.

Secondly, we do not make any claims to exhaustiveness; indeed, given the wide variety of sources in which papers on professional discourse appear, constructing an exhaustive bibliography appears an almost impossible task. Further, there is also a language bias in this bibliography, in that the vast majority of the work mentioned is written in English. We suspect, however, that this subgroup also represents the majority of the papers on professional discourse published at this moment.

Thirdly, no attempt was made to represent every possible type of professional discourse. We restrict ourselves to seven broad categories: discourse in business and industry, in legal contexts, in medical contexts, in the mass media, in schools, in politics, and finally in academia