Abstracts in Academic Discourse. Variation and Change

Marina Bondi, Rosa Lorès Sanz (eds).
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This rich edited collection consists of thirteen chapters that address both time-honored and new topics using rigorous and innovative methods. Together, they meaningfully expand our knowledge of abstract variation across disciplines, languages, and time. A specific strength of all the chapters in the volume is the discussion of connections between discourse variation and social variables.

The first section, focusing on intercultural variation, includes four chapters looking at five disciplines in three languages in contrast with English. The first chapter, by ALONSO-ALMEIDA, reports a corpus-based, contrastive study of evidentials and epistemic devices in English and Spanish computing, medicine, and law abstracts. Among the chapter's many strengths are a thorough review of evidentiality and epistemicity and a rigorous methodology. Perhaps its most significant finding is the trend, already suggested by other studies, that claims in English are softer than they are in Spanish.

Chapter two by BUSCH-LAUER, features a useful literature review and presents the results of the author's own cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural comparison of English and German abstracts. The latter have tended to conform to Anglo-American expectations. The chapter closes with suggestions for teaching and further research.

Chapter three by DIANI focuses on a little studied language in contrastive studies: Italian. Her results show that Italian linguistics abstracts often contain fewer moves; they tend to exclude Results and Conclusion. The English abstracts are more likely to problematize the paper's topic, to represent the author explicitly, and to evaluate findings positively. Some of these trends have also been found in contrastive studies of English and Mexican Spanish abstracts (Sandoval-Cruz, 2015) and in LORÉS SANZ's study in this same volume, suggesting a common preference for a rhetoric of justification across these two Romance languages versus a preference for a rhetoric of persuasion in English (Jiménez-Alexandre & Erdurán, 2008).

Chapter four by LORÉS SANZ offers a nuanced discussion of the differences and similarities found in pairs of translated abstracts as well as the possible explanations for those differences. Like DIANI with Italian, the author finds that Spanish abstracts tend to be more impersonal, use fewer moves, and problematize their motives to a lesser extent (i.e. by not using Move 2). Her study of translated versions finds a great influence of Spanish in the translations, but also accommodation processes, which together result in the production of a third text.

Chapter five, by ŁYDA and WARCHAŁ, focuses on comparing lexical differences across genders and native vs. non-native English. This is an innovative study as gender differences in abstracts had not been previously investigated. In general, the authors find that gender, together with non-nativeness, influence the use of specialized vocabulary: male NNSs tend to use more specialized words than female NNSs or NSs. The authors interpret that male NNSs feel "a greater need to confirm their academic status and legitimize their presence among other top-ranked English-writing scholars" (page) than female NNSs do.

The next section on cross-disciplinary variation begins with a chapter by BORDET looking at variations in two disciplines: materials science and didactics of mathematics, both in L1 French and L2 English. Her innovative focus is on collocational chains as contributors to text cohesion and to the creation of an insider ethos. She finds discipline-mediated L1 effects: L2 writers, particularly in didactics of mathematics, where the authors' command of fewer lexical resources becomes an obstacle to the development of field-specific coherence and an authoritative disciplinary persona.

The second chapter in the section, by CAVALIERI, compared applied linguistics and medicine abstracts by examining their structure, metadiscourse, and verbs of saying. Medicine prefers the inclusion of the results and discussion moves, the situating research move and the authorial persona in the methods move. Another meaningful difference is the greater attribution of utterances to others in applied linguistics. These findings are interpreted as signaling a greater emphasis on empiricism on the part of medical authors, as well as a more elaborate construction of a community of informed readers.

In the third chapter, HATZITHEODOROU examines law and business abstracts using an eclectic move analysis framework that integrates macrostructural

and microstructural analyses. Most of the chapter is devoted to discussing this framework. The author finds that business abstracts are longer, have more moves and are more empirical, whereas law abstracts focus on problematizing topics theoretically. Although the author does not make this claim, a likely cause of these differences lies in the social science nature of business research versus the more humanities-like orientation of legal scholarship.

The fourth chapter, by SALA, reports an ambitious and rigorous study of abstracts as indicators of diverging and converging disciplinary epistemologies. The author uses the results of an analysis of attribution and knowledge-thematization strategies in four disciplines (medicine, applied linguistics, law, and economics), to embark in a sage, complex and nuanced exploration of the epistemological correlates of these features' varying frequencies and distributions. In general, the soft sciences make more recourse to a rhetoric of persuasion, whereas medicine is more based on a rhetoric of justification. One wishes the author had made references to the rich literature on the discourses of economics, medicine, and law in order to expand his already significant insights, but this is an understandable shortcoming in the light of space limitations.

The fifth chapter, by SALAGER MEYER, ALCARAZ ARIZA and LEWIN, examines the structures of abstracts in alternative medicine journals in four genres to determine the extent to which they comply with journal requirements and resemble those in other medicine journals. They find that the four genres are not structured as expected, with the research paper journals being the most structured and the review paper abstracts the least structured ones.

Section three, addressing diachronic perspectives, begins with a chapter by BONDI that explores variation in voice markers in history, economics and linguistics from 1990 through 2010. She finds a general increase in first-person and other voice markers, which she interprets as an increasing construction of "both the novelty and importance of one's own position and the identity of the writer as a researcher" (page 268) and also as a rising awareness of abstracts' rhetorical functions. Other findings concern the co-variation of voice features within and across the disciplines, which lead the author to conclude that voice markers "act as micro-systems of meanings" (page 269)

In the next chapter, GILLAERTS examines diachronic variation in metadiscoursal features from 1987 to 2007 in *Applied Linguistics*. It features

an excellent discussion of methodological difficulties that will be very useful to novice researchers. The author finds an overall increase of interactive metadiscourse coupled with a decrease in interactional metadiscourse. Further, "for interactives, the decrease of transitions goes hand in hand with an increase in frame markers and evidentials, whereas for interactionals the loss of hedges is compensated by a gain of boosters and attitude markers" (page). These findings signal the abstracts' evolution towards a mini-article with an overt, strong persuasive intent.

The final chapter, by OKAMURA and SHAW, examines variation in move structure, personal pronouns, reporting verbs and theoretical nouns in journals of three disciplines: biology, economics, and marketing. Their results show a general increase in personal pronouns in active voice sentences and epistemically committed reporting verbs (e.g. *demonstrate*, *reveal*). Only the biology journal, *Cell*, has evolved to a more standardized move structure with a greater frequency of the Gap move. The authors compare these findings to trends revealed by other studies and discuss them in light of sociological variables such as journal guidelines and the rise of online publishing.

In closing, I wholeheartedly concur with JOHN M. SWALES' appraisal in the afterword that this is an "impressive volume" (page 322). As Professor Swales states, one of its most welcome features is the authors' careful attempt at "relating features of abstracts in a field with the epistemologies prevalent in that field" (page 322) and with contextual factors of academia that shape, and are shaped by, the language of abstracts.

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