

## A combined perspective of sociology and linguistics on exploring academic discourse

J. R. Martin, Karl Maton, Y. J. Doran, *Accessing Academic Discourse: Systemic Functional Linguistics and Legitimation Code Theory*. London: Routledge, 2020. Pp. ix + 316. Hardback \$221, ISBN: 978 0 367 23608 3

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Academic discourse is usually considered as the gateway to educational success. Systemic functional linguistics (SFL) originated by M. A. K. Halliday is a mature linguistic approach that is now the basis of a wide-ranging international community of scholars and educators dealing with the analysis of academic discourse. Comparatively, legitimation code theory (LCT), which extends ideas from the sociologists Basil Bernstein and Pierre Bourdieu, is much younger. However, the dialogue and collaboration between the two theories can be helpful in exploring the nature of academic discourse. A timely volume, *Accessing Academic Discourse: Systemic Functional Linguistics and Legitimation Code Theory* illustrates how LCT is pushing and provoking SFL into generating greater explanatory power and theoretical innovation in its engagement with accessing academic discourse.

The volume is organized into one opening chapter, which is a general overview and introduction, and four sub-parts: Part I (Chapters 2 to 3) deals with the opening ideas of LCT; Part II (Chapters 4 to 5) contains the responses from SFL to provocations from LCT; Part III (Chapters 6 to 7) illustrates how the way LCT brings knowers into the picture can support the explorations of values by SFL; Part IV (Chapters 8 to 10) concerns the fruits of the dialogue with LCT for SFL understanding and practices in dealing with the academic discourse in the classroom.

Chapter 1 provides the background, rationale and outline of the whole volume. The authors (Martin, Maton and Doran) start the chapter by introducing the register variable 'field' which is considered as the strand of SFL study that firstly attracts linguists to Bernstein's code theory and in turn to the dialogue

with LCT. Bernstein's distinction between 'common sense' and 'uncommon sense' is the focus of educational linguistic work on 'field', which is considered as a set of activity sequences oriented to some global institutional purpose, alongside the taxonomies of entities (people, places and things, both abstract and concrete). Educational linguists are especially interested in how everyday sequences and taxonomies (Bernstein's 'common sense') differed from the academic ones (Bernstein's 'uncommon sense') challenging students across subject areas in teaching and learning. As to the uncommon sense, Bernstein then divides it into hierarchical knowledge structures and horizontal knowledge structures. However, Maton argues that Bernstein's concepts of 'knowledge structures' are good to think with but less useful to analyse with. Then he proposes LCT, which is the conceptual toolkit for the analysis of specific knowledge practices, after which the five dimensions (specialization, semantics, autonomy, density, and temporality) are briefly introduced, though only the first two are discussed in detail.

Based on the opening ideas of LCT, Maton and Chen in Chapter 2 discusses knowledge-knower structures from the dimension of specialization in the context of a study of Chinese students in Australia, by analyzing their curriculum, pedagogy and assessments. Specialization is said to comprise a dimension of epistemic relation (ER) between the practices and the object of study and a dimension of social relation (SR) between practices and the subject. In terms of specialization, the students described past experiences of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment as all manifesting stronger ER and weaker SR. While the 'student-centered' pedagogy the teachers espoused in interviews and enacted in their units of study embodied weaker ER and stronger SR. This code clash can answer the initial question proposed at the beginning as to why



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some students are more successful, and can shed light on other areas such as socialization practices, parent-child, organizational structures, and so forth.

In Chapter 3, Maton introduces the concepts 'semantic gravity (SG)' and 'semantic density (SD)' from the dimension of semantics and illustrates how semantic wave is formed to explain student work and classroom practices. SG is defined as the degree of the context dependence of meaning in social practices. SD is defined as the degree of condensation of meaning within sociocultural practices. It is argued that cumulative modality of knowledge building practices is characterized by an internal semantic code with weak gravity and strong density and an external semantic code with strong gravity and weak density embedded in a knowledge code, whereas a segmented modality of knowledge building is characterized by opposite internal and external semantic codes embedded in a knower code. These two chapters develop a thought-provoking framework to analyze knowledge practices, which are crucial in analyzing academic discourse.

In Part II, Martin begins to rethink the register variables 'mode' and 'field' based on the applicable capability of SG and SD in dealing with the complexes of linguistic practices. In Chapter 4, responding to the notion of SG, Martin and Matruglio investigate contextual dependence metafunctionally by analyzing ancient history classroom discourse, which gives ideational (iconicity), interpersonal (negotiability) and textual (implicitness) orientations to 'presence'. In Chapter 5, responding the LCT concept of SD, Martin factors knowledge structure metafunctionally by analyzing secondary school science and humanities discourse, giving ideational (technicality), interpersonal (iconization) and textual (aggregation) orientations to 'mass'. As Martin (p. 25) points out in the volume, '... these new concepts characterize the array of linguistic resources potentially at stake during changes in semantic gravity and semantic density of knowledge practices – precisely which resources are enacted in a text is a matter for empirical research.'

Part III brings SFL and LCT together to explore knowers and values. In Chapter 6, by utilizing the appraisal framework of SFL to analyze the media texts, Doran works out a map of the bonding networks (in SFL terms) or axiological constellations (in LCT terms) in which implicit evaluation, especially affording attitude, sit. In Chapter 7, Oteiza illustrates how events and processes are constructed and evaluated in the discourse of history. He also draws on the concepts SG and SD from LCT to explore levels of context-dependence and complexity that build cumulative knowledge in historical thinking. These two papers

are bold attempts to analyze the appraisal resources via LCT.

Part IV concerns the fruits of the dialogue with LCT for SFL understanding and practices in dealing with academic discourse in the classroom. The three papers involved are all based on the profile of 'presence' and 'mass' – developed in response to LCT, presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 8 (Hood) explores the significance of 'presence' with the analysis of live lectures in the Human Science discipline. With the application of SG in LCT, Hood explores the texturing of knowledge in the science mode and how this might function to scaffold students into the specialized, uncommon sense knowledge of their field. The last two chapters (Rose) focus on building a pedagogic metalanguage. In Chapter 9, for introducing teachers to the curriculum genres that have been designed for teaching reading and writing in his Reading to Learn programme, Rose introduces 'mass' and 'presence' as measures of how training is enacted in practice and how it is best presented in teacher training. In Chapter 10, Rose changes from curriculum genre to knowledge genre. 'Mass' and 'presence' are used again to explore how academic metalanguage informed by functional linguistics is recontextualized for use in pedagogical practice.

Broadly, this volume comprises ten cutting-edge papers which bring together sociological and linguistic approaches to achieving academic success. Theoretically, it integrates the theoretical framework of SFL and LCT, and the representative works can reveal greater explanatory power and insights into education and knowledge and can provoke new theoretical improvement. Practically, the areas enacting both frameworks rage across issues in education as well as other social fields such as law and politics. There is also room for further improvement. As to the research methodology, it would be more persuasive and convincing to combine some quantitative analysis with the qualitative researches. What's more, the range of data resources could be widened to other academic categories such as popular science, research papers, etc., apart from curriculum in this volume. Finally, since there is a large number of new terms and multiple theories, it would be helpful if the authors provided a glossary of terms and added more annotations to the theories. Thus, it is better that the readers have a basic understanding of the framework of SFL and sociology. Otherwise it may be a bit abstract for newcomers to understand when theoretical jargon appears.

The volume offers researchers in linguistic and sociological areas a useful framework to analyze academic discourse. It is highly recommended to all serious scholars and practitioners who are engaged in the investigation of education, linguistics, sociology, and academic discourse.