Culture in Language: Academic English, Variation in Research

Academic Writing Workshop July 20th, Chemnitz

Introduction to Comparative Research on Academic Writing

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1. Introduction: Knowledge & cultures

1.1. Defining culture

James Spradley:
Culture is the acquired knowledge people use to interpret experience and generate behavior.

Where does “cultural variation” (in metadiscourse) come from in early academic knowledge presentation?

contextualisation by author as
male - female?
language: first - second?
institutional acculturation in the discipline? on a functional basis?
2. Key Concepts

2.1. convention vs. individuality
2.2. reader-/listener-orientation, argumentation structure, discourse management
2.3. genre
2.4. meta-language: author-involvement, -commitment (hedging)
3. Texts as database

3.1. Corpora combine theory and practice different compilation principles:

- ChemCorpus (Michaela, Dana)
- SPACE Corpus (Christoph, Dana)
- ZAMA (Sven)
- CamAcCorpus (Daniel)
- GhanaAcCorpus (Jacinta)
- Brno Corpus
- TürkCorpus?
- SEEurop. Corpus?
3.2. Culture in a genre approach to academic discourses

**research “output”**
- research article
  - book reviews
  - project proposals
- conference presentations

**science “journalism”**
- popular science articles
  - popular blogs (David Crystal)
  - popular science films (Horizon)
- popular science books

**teacher “talk”/e-learning**
- ppt presentations
  - lectures
  - student presentations
- textbooks
  - Wikis
  - www pages

**student “literacy”**
- fieldwork notes / essays
- MA/BA thesis
- seminar presentations

“Novice Academic English”
3.3. Common compilation principles?

- argumentative essays? (ICLE)

- Chem Corpus
  - Magister Theses
  - Magister Written (timed)
  - BA Theses
  - MA Theses
  - Reports?
  - Applications?

- Brno Corpus
- TurkAcCorpus?
- SEEAcWriting Corpus?

- related project: CamAcwriting (Nkemleke fc.)
Nkemleke (fc.)

2: to produce a Manual that helps students “successfully” write in the following genres

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>introduction</th>
<th>key concepts</th>
<th>texts</th>
<th>analysis</th>
<th>conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research articles</td>
<td>Theses and dissertations</td>
<td>Term papers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Books and monographs</td>
<td>Conference presentations</td>
<td>Grant proposals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statements of intent</td>
<td>Research proposals</td>
<td>Abstracts</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.4. Example ZAMA Corpus from Stellenbosch

- 150 texts
- gender balanced
- ethnic/language background according to name: English, Afrikaans, (S)African languages, rest (Indian, Chinese, Luo)
- department-stratified: aim 5 (6) MA theses in over 20 disciplines
  - Anthropology
  - Chemistry
  - English (Lit.)
  - Curriculum Studies
  - Geography
  - History
  - Journalism
  - (Gen.) Linguistics
  - Mechanical Engineering
  - Civil Engineering
  - Psychology
  - (Public) Law
  - Political Science
  - etc.
4. Sample Analysis ZAMA Corpus: Variation in personal pronoun usage

author involvement: \( I, me, my \)
\( we, us, our \)

reader address: \( you, your \)

semantic differences:
inclusive - exclusive \( we, pluralis\ majestatis/modestiae \)
\( you \) as audience - \( (any)one \)

examples:

„I will now review some of literature relevant to South Africa in order to provide a context for the study.“ (ZMA06BA-YE)

„[…] these larger social patterns […] will have to be addressed if we are to curb this phenomenon.“ (ZMA08MV-YX)

„Furthermore, you need to ‘comprehend ‘ [what] you’re reading […]” (ZMA10MM-EE)
4.1. Variation in personal pronoun usage

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<th>male</th>
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4.1. Variation in personal pronoun usage by gender

relative/1M words and by 4 functional categories

- 1st sing
- 1st pl
- 2nd sing

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<tr>
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4.1. Variation in personal pronoun usage by language

relative/1M words and by 4 functional categories
### 4.2. Variation in personal pronoun usage by discipline

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4.2. Variation in personal pronoun usage by discipline
5. Conclusion

combine research – teaching - cooperation?

general:
- variations are culture-specific
- discipline culture > gender/language culture

metalanguage instruction on a functional basis?
- personal pronouns (explicitly categorical)
- > cohesion (overused through teaching?)
- > modality/hedging (complex, less awareness)

-- > more comparative research
References


