

## REVIEWS

**Orts Llopis, M. A., Breeze, R. and Gotti, M. (eds) (2017) *Power, Persuasion and Manipulation in Specialised Genres. Providing Keys to the Rhetoric of Professional Communities*. Bern: Peter Lang. 368 pp.**

The thematic collection edited by María Ángeles Orts Llopis, Ruth Breeze and Maurizio Gotti (published by Peter Lang Publishing within the series *Linguistic Insights – Studies in Language and Communication*) bears a self-explanatory title since its purport can readily be characterised by the six keywords used: power, persuasion, manipulation, specialised genres, rhetoric and professional communities.

In the Introduction to the volume, Orts Llopis and Breeze outline the scope of the book and examine the phenomenon of power exerted especially through linguistic persuasion and manipulation to establish the main theoretical points of departure for the studies presented. Furthermore, the editors meritoriously map the latest developments in the area of persuasion and related research. Quoting Sancho Guinda et al. (2014: 18), the editors propose “to focus upon the study of linguistic persuasion and power in the written texts of professional communication, to go further into the understanding of how they are ‘constructed, interpreted, used and exploited in the achievement of specific goals’ (p. 9)”. As stated in the Introduction, the common denominator is genre theory, which looks at different discourses of professional communication as well as a typically high level of rhetorical sophistication mastered exclusively by their members.

To explore the operation of the conceptual triad of the interrelated phenomena of power, persuasion and manipulation in different specialised discourses, the book presents papers that discuss several professional fields, such as advertising, politics, law, business, medicine, social work, education and the media. Individual chapters shed light on the communicative strategies that enable professionals to exercise persuasion and manipulation through legitimation in the social context of their profession. The authors adhere to methods of qualitative and quantitative aspects of discourse analysis, genre theory, and, in some cases, corpus linguistics. Throughout the volume, the authors do not label power automatically as a negative phenomenon or coercive force exerted by a hierarchically superior authority, but rather as a commonplace socially-motivated feature of most, if not all, discourses of human communication. In this respect, the texts under examination are said to be “often moulded to promote the interests of the professional group, the individual practitioner, or some other entity” (pp. 15-16).

As persuasion and manipulation are seen in the book as distinct, albeit overlapping, concepts capable of power enhancement, the monograph is thematically divided into two main parts that are titled “Power through Manipulation” and “Power through Persuasion”.

Part One offers six studies on discourses that manifest manipulation as their primary communicative strategy. In the opening chapter, Vijay and Aditi Bhatia explore the field of media reporting, addressing interdiscursive manipulation related to the scandalous case of the Panama Papers in India. Purposeful mystification along with seemingly authentic information is analysed through the prism of newspaper reports on those who were thought to have been involved in the affair; to manipulate the readers’ opinion, a speculative picture is provided by means of a sophisticated set of language realisations. In her study dealing with annual speeches by the Secretary General of the International Maritime Organization, Ana Bocanegra-Valle addresses recurring motifs used in the texts, one of the most frequent of which is globalisation, and how this enhances the effect of legitimation of the institution’s acts, shaping the public image of the institution. A totally different discourse, namely academic medicine, is examined by Shirley Carter-Thomas and Elizabeth Rowley-Jolivet; they address the way medical authorities exert power in editorials of medical journals through intricate choice of language means. Among other things, an unprecedented degree of interpersonal communication aiming at the consensus with and persuasion of the readership is observed in this genre, such as numerous interactive features, emphatic syntactic structures and modality. Another medical, yet much more controversial, issue is presented in the chapter by Giuliana Garzone, who discusses strategies through which authors construe credibility with their audience in the sensitive area of surrogacy. She observes ways in which surrogacy organisations persuade audiences of their professionalism, reliability and expertise with the help of ethical and pathetic appeals, whereas the rational aspect (*logos*) of the message is knowingly backgrounded. Manipulation is thus traced in the very pattern of combining the Aristotelian triad of appeal. Esther Monzó-Nebot explores how the court of justice can be maneuvered into a controversial sentence in a sexual assault case via communication strategies adopted to establish or restore a preferred social identity to others during interaction, i.e. face-work; through manipulative language, apparently to the detriment of the victim, the wrongdoer makes the judge justify a moderate (i.e. unjust) decision. In the concluding chapter of Part One, Pascual Pérez-Paredes investigates persuasion achieved through manipulation in the green paper issued by the UK government on higher education. Analysing the language realisations deployed, he sees the UK’s higher education as

a competitive, business-like arena, in which official documents are used to manipulate public opinion.

As has been mentioned, the common denominator of the chapters presented in Part Two is persuasion. In her study dealing with the Scottish non-governmental organisation Zero Tolerance, Antoinette Mary Fage-Butler contrasts two distinct types of texts produced for two different target audiences to forestall violence against women: the lesson plans for primary schools, and the handbook designed for journalists; though the strategies adopted in the two diverging genres differ, the persuasive force induced is of comparable intensity. In the area of persuasive communication in business, Daniel Gallego-Hernández, using the genre analysis method, offers a fine-grained discussion on promotional banking texts in French and Spanish. He concludes that the diversity observed between the two lingua-cultural settings has to do with the two cultures in question as well as a divergent development of the genre in the two countries. Out of the two following chapters that address the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), in the first one Maurizio Gotti examines English translations of Chinese legal texts that – unlike the Western arbitration system – manifest traits of mediation and conciliation and aim at dispute resolution in the context of the processes adopted in business circles. Such a non-antagonistic approach is understood to make it possible for entrepreneurs to maintain the image of cohesion, respect and dignity in the community, which seems to be in compliance with Confucian conventions, and is interpreted as opposition to the ethos of imbalance and conflict, which seem to be more common in West countries. ADR is also discussed in Diana Giner's chapter focusing on international investment arbitration. She focuses on mitigating strategies deployed in the discourse of awards and on gradability within the texts under investigation: the argumentation of the arbitrators appears to undulate on the scale from reinforced reasoning to intentionally weakened points. This functional oscillation enables the arbitrators both to be given credit by the parties and yet to declare adverse conclusions. Juan Carlos Palmer-Silveira's chapter studies the differences in the ways in which English-speaking companies present themselves on their websites and by means of social media on the one hand, and how such Internet self-presentation is approached by international companies on the other; the study concludes that persuasive strategies are rather traditional. In her study on persuasion related to risk communication, Carmen Sancho Guinda looks at the accident reports ('dockets') published by the US aviation safety office; she argues that these texts, which are meant to warn the general public and prevent risky behaviour, differ to a large extent from regular aviation accident summaries, especially in the inventory of both linguistic and extra-linguistic means employed, such as animations, personal testimonials and hyperlinks.

She sees such persuasive communication as multimodal (appealing to visual, verbal and other modes). In the final chapter of Part Two, Holly Vass analyses US Supreme Court majority and dissenting opinions, in which the judges deploy careful persuasive tools, hedging in particular, to find the desired equilibrium between maintaining respect and authority and, at the same time, expressing their convictions on their colleagues' dubious or even overtly incorrect decisions.

On the whole, the thematic volume is carefully edited and well-structured. It presents a truly unique set of papers by renowned authors that not only relate to one another as well as to the main theme, but also manifest inner cohesion and coherence. In other words, the strength of the volume resides in the synergy of the individual studies that operate in orchestrated unison. The array of the specialised discourses examined is wide enough to make the conclusions representative, and yet circumstantial enough to illuminate the specificities of the individual professional communities; the volume thus displays genuine unity in diversity.

What can be appreciated in all the analyses offered is the dual approach towards the study of language data, i.e. the minute description of the linguistic realisations along with rigorous methodology on the one hand and the discussion of the function of the language data in the pursuit of persuasion/manipulation in particular contexts on the other. Last but not least, it is also the contribution to the systemisation of terminology in the area of the study of power that makes the individual chapters of the monograph enriching; the very distinction and treatment of the principal terminological triplet (power – persuasion – manipulation) appears to be stimulating for scholars researching into the multifaceted phenomenon of linguistic persuasion. In conclusion, unveiling different communicative strategies, *Power, Persuasion and Manipulation in Specialised Genres* undoubtedly provides the readers with a variety of routes to a better understanding of the ways in which professional communities exert power, be it through persuasion or through manipulation. As such, it definitely ranks among the most progressive, revealing and in many respects ground-breaking must-reads in the field of persuasive discourse.

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