

REVIEWS

Zapletalová, G. (2009) *Academic Discourse and the Genre of Research Article*, Univerzita Mateja Biela a Filozofická fakulta Ostravské univerzity, Banská Bystrica 2009. 234 pp.

The book *Academic Discourse and the Genre of Research Article* by Gabriela Zapletalová is a new contribution to the rapidly growing number of publications dealing with rhetorical strategies and linguistic features used in the key genre of the academic world – the research article. While drawing on the systemic-functional approach to the analysis of language, the author adopts the well-established Swalesian concept of genre analysis, which she applies in a detailed study of argumentative research articles. Conceived as a corpus-based textlinguistic investigation into the communicative strategies used in a particular genre, Zapletalová's research undertakes to explore the multifaceted character of the research article by focusing on three phenomena which reflect linguistic choices and social positioning considerations helping writers to achieve intended argumentative effects, namely passivization, lexical cohesion and pronominal reference. Due to its applied concerns, the new book promises to be of great interest not only to linguists, but also to students of English and novice writers who face the challenging task of getting acquainted with the writing habits of the academic discourse community.

The book comprises four chapters further grouped into two parts – the first part, which is made up of a single chapter, outlines the theoretical background of the research, while the considerably more extensive analytical second part consists of three chapters, each scrutinizing a particular aspect of the genre under investigation. In the discussion of the theoretical foundations of her study, Zapletalová clarifies her understanding of the key terms in text linguistics and genre analysis – text, discourse, text type and genre, whose definitions are still under discussion in the linguistic community. While aligning herself with Tárníková's (2002) view that text and discourse are complementary terms, and that text may be used as an umbrella term for both, the author regards text type as a conventionalized linguistic object inherently connected with particular conventions and prototypical language devices. Although genre, as a discourse category, is also characterised in terms of typical linguistic features, content, structure and organization, its main constitutive criterion is considered to be its social purpose. It is therefore not surprising that in the subsequent section

of the book, which outlines the genre analysis framework, Zapletalová focuses primarily on the social dimensions of genre. When relating the research article to its social context and functions in the academic discourse community, the author avoids the common pitfall of approaching the genre as a monolithic one. While stressing the impact of subject matter, procedures and discourse macrostructure on intrageneric variation, she focuses on argumentative research articles, a sub-genre characterised by theoretical considerations rather than experimentation in which writers focus on “building a rational framework and supporting it with quotations and logical arguments” (p. 41). It should be noted that the most important distinction between argumentative and experimental research articles highlighted by the author is their macrostructure – the ‘inverted pyramid’ structure is characteristic of argumentative articles, while experimental ones use the ‘hour-glass’ structural pattern.

The issues of passivization, lexical patterning and pronominal reference which are addressed in the analytical part of the study reflect stylistic, rhetorical and pragmatic considerations. The investigation is carried out on a balanced corpus comprising 24 research articles (approx. 250,000 words) representing two disciplines, linguistics and economics, published in two journals – *The Journal of Linguistics* and *The Economic Journal*. The composition of the corpus indicates that an additional aim of the investigation is to carry out a cross-disciplinary comparison of articles dealing with linguistics and economics. This comparative dimension of the research is restricted, however, to the study of passivization and pronominal reference; the examination of lexical patterning is performed exclusively on the basis of the economics texts.

The investigation into the potential of the active-passive interface to signal interpersonal choices indicating the degree of authorial involvement and rhetorical moves in the development of the argument in the argumentative research article, draws on Tarone et al. (1981, 1998). While confirming the quantitative predominance of active voice structures in both economics and linguistics articles, Zapletalová’s research shows that, from a textual perspective, passivization in research articles can be seen as a systemic possibility contributing to text-perspectivization. The four additional functions of passivization considered in the study are depersonalization, objectivization of events, agentive or non-agentive representation, and enhancing the perception of cohesion and coherence in discourse. Based on the results of her analysis, the author draws a tentative distinction between passive moves which are associated with mental states resulting from the process of persuasion, and active moves whose function is to convince the reader to accept a particular opinion or stance.

In the discussion of lexical patterning Zapletalová applies Hoey's (1991) approach to the analysis of lexical cohesion in an attempt to evaluate how lexical bonding can be used as an effective way of constructing intelligible summaries of the content of research articles. While comparing the informative value and readability of summaries produced according to three different procedures, i.e. exclusion of marginal sentences, inclusion of central sentences and inclusion of topic-controlling sentences, Zapletalová concludes that although all procedures can be used to produce intelligible summaries, the summaries based on omitting marginal sentences seem to be the most workable. Of particular interest are her findings concerning the size of an intelligible summary, which in agreement with previous research she sets at 30 per cent of the original text, and her observation that not all structural parts of the argumentative research articles under investigation are equally cohesive.

The last chapter of the analytical part of the book explores pronominal reference as a rhetorical strategy for managing authorial presence in argumentative research articles. Zapletalová considers two aspects of pronominal choices reflecting writer identity, namely deictic semantics and gender. The most valuable findings of the study concern the semantic functions of first-person pronouns in association with rhetorical moves, which reveal the presence of disciplinary variation. The results of the quantitative analysis convincingly show that although first-person pronouns are the most significant indicator of authorial presence in both disciplines, their frequency of occurrence is considerably higher in linguistics than in economics articles. This is interpreted as an indicator of the stronger personal bias expressed in linguistics text, while the more impersonal character of economics text is related to their mathematical-theoretical complexity. The most significant deictic pronoun is considered to be *we*, which can be used as a powerful device for negotiating relationships between the writer, the readers and the disciplinary discourse community by indicating engagement, solidarity, shared knowledge or expert authority. The role of *I* to show strong authorial voice is typically associated with outlining research methods and structuring discourse in linguistics articles, and with discussion and conclusion moves in economics texts. Logically enough, the analysis of the functions of *I* is carried out on the single-authored articles included in the corpus, while the semantic functions of *we* are explored on the basis of multiple-authored texts. A detailed comparative analysis of the functions of *I* and *we* in single-authored texts would have made the study more complete.

The implication that emerges from Zapletalová's study is that the academic article is a multifaceted discourse phenomenon which should be explored taking into consideration intrageneric and disciplinary variation in order to reveal the

motivation for genre-specific language and rhetorical choices. It also proves that genre analysis is inherently related to social and contextual considerations, including the communicative conventions of a particular discourse community.

To conclude, it must be stressed that Zapletalová's book is a very useful addition to applied genre analysis and will undoubtedly prove to be a valuable and helpful text for both linguists and students of the English language. While providing a detailed analysis of the sub-genre of argumentative research articles, it reveals interesting insights into communicative strategies used in academic discourse and suggests various directions for further research in the field of genre analysis.

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