

## *Developments in genre studies in functional and systemic linguistics*

María de los Ángeles GÓMEZ-GONZÁLEZ  
Universidade de Santiago de Compostela

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*Linguistic Choice across Genres. Variation in Spoken and Written English* (LCAG) is based on a selection of papers that were presented at the VIIth *International Systemic Functional Workshop*, held in 1995 at the University of Valencia, Spain. The contributions explore the potential of and the contextual constraints on *language use* within the systemic framework in a wide range of different text types (e.g. administrative forms, research papers, emergency telephone calls, etc.), raising significant issues for description, application and future research in the field of *genre* studies.

A number of systemicists have done essential groundwork in the exploration of the formal and functional features of different text types or genres. One trend of research has demonstrated, for example, that a text's *method of development* (i.e. the choice of Theme clause by clause in a text) or its *thematic progression* (i.e. where Themes come from and how they relate to previous Themes and Rhemes) do not occur randomly but are sensitive to *genre* and *register variation*. Some cases in point are: Ghadessy (1993, 1995), Hasan & Fries (1995), and Gómez-González (2001). Also worth of consideration are the investigations that study the role of interrelated lexical choices in establishing *cohesion*, either to indicate *topic (dis)continuity* or to signal different types of *connection* and *patterning* between parts of varying text types, as in Hasan (1984), Taylor-Torsello (1997), and Downing *et al.* (1998), to name but a few.

LCAG gives a step forward in the field of genre studies within this framework, raising significant issues for description, application and future research. The book is organised into three sections: *Introduction*, where Gunter Kress represents meaning as the outcome of social-semiotic work, *Part I* including ten papers concerned with different aspects of *written genres*, and *Part II* comprising six contributions on *spoken genres*. In the following lines I will summarise and comment on each of these sixteen papers. The discussion may actually be regarded as a tribute to clarify or delve further into the many issues raised in these highly informative and thoroughly thought-provoking contributions.

Taking two complete short written texts as case studies, Geoff Thompson's *Resonance in text* gives convincing evidence that the text type or register determines the effects and means for conveying so-called *lexicogrammatical resonance*. This is characterised as 'the overall cumulative effect of the way in which certain transitivity choices seem to reinforce each other by repeating a particular facet of meaning' (LCAG: 30). This phenomenon is portrayed as: (1) prosodic in nature operating within indeterminate discourse boundaries (2) neutral as regards the degree of conscious exploitation of language choices, and (3) implying that meanings are expressed by wordings at various points in the text, rather than linearly. After Thompson's conspicuous exposition, not only are these three features of text resonance brought to the fore, but the potential of this kind of research emerges extraordinarily clearly. Yet conclusions could perhaps be drawn on more solid grounds by giving a fuller account of the non-linear quality of resonance, and, as Thompson himself suggests, by extending the analysis to other aspects of (non-)experiential meaning, say in different languages, across a wider variety of genres, in different modes of expression, or throughout different periods of time. One must accept, however, that all these issues cannot possibly be covered in depth in a paper. A more feasible task seems to be the clarification of what difference there is –if any– between the notions of *resonance* and *tone*, because it is not clear whether the former should be taken as one aspect of the latter or whether both represent interchangeable categories. The discussion is otherwise well illustrated with examples and is, as already noted, illuminating.

Thomas Bloor, in turn, examines *conditional expressions* in economic forecasts and linguistic philosophy research articles. Bloor finds that, while philosophical argumentation is found to exploit mostly *if-then* structures, economic forecasts abound with four types of conditionals: (1) the *sufficient condition* (typically *if p*) (2) the *necessary condition* (typically *only if p*) (3) the *supplementing condition* (typically *especially if p*), and (4) the concessive condition (typically *even if p*). In addition, hedging of the type *if p then probably q* or *if p then possibly q* is reported to be very evident in economic forecasting but rarer in philosophy data, whereas tendencies are reversed when

it is the conditional clause itself that is hedged (e.g. *if, as we have claimed* (LCAG: 53)). Other types of structural realizations of conditional meanings are also mentioned: *if, assuming, provided, given, suppose (that)*, a prepositional phrase as Adjunct (*With no further fall in the saving ratio, private consumption could rise by 1.5 per cent* (LCAG: 56)), purpose clauses, and the so-called *extended hypotheticals*, i.e. hypothetical constructs which may be triggered either by projecting verbs (*suppose, consider, pretend...then*) or by anaphoric metatextual nouns (*account, idea, interpretation*), typically in philosophical argumentation.

Even if Bloor's paper does give an insight into the meanings and realisations of conditionals, the exposition could perhaps benefit from a general restructuring, seeking for a more comprehensive, more systematic and a less *ad hoc* view of the constructions, preferably supported by quantitative (statistical) and qualitative discourse evidence. Presumably a clearer picture of conditionals variation across economic forecasts and linguistic philosophy research articles could be attained by systematically contrasting the forms, the functions (including modality features) and the frequency of all (rather than the most common) instances of conditionals and extended hypotheticals found in the two genres. With this suggestion in mind we can only but subscribe to Bloor's observation that a wealth of interesting research awaits to be done on conditionals across text-types.

Following that, Michael P. Jordan focuses on three main types of *cause-effect* signalling in English. The first, implicit and subtle connections including prepositional indicators (e.g. *because of, as a result of, caused by*) and time indicators (e.g. *when, before, after*), are said to appear mainly in informal genres and reporting. To the second group belong inter-sentential and inter-clausal cause-effect connections of the type: pro-clausal *This* + verb patterns (*thus, thereby*)...-ing clauses (e.g. *resulting, causing*), clausal *which*, expressions such as *as a result, and so*, which are associated with mature writing. The same applies to the third group of cause-effect relations realised by rankshifting methods and subordination, in particular: non-thematic and thematic rankshifted cause-effect nominals, verbless clauses (introduced by *due to, because of*), and thematic cause-effect subordinated clauses, which are said to abide by the *given-before-new principle*.

On the whole, the paper is a successful attempt to demonstrate that choice on the cause-effect relation is determined by such factors as register, presupposition, knownness, continuity, clarity and conciseness. One misses, however, a more systematic and statistically supported analysis of the relations under study, explaining for example the relative frequencies of their varied structural realizations as well as their different functional potential and uses across different genre types. Admittedly, as Jordan himself concedes, this paper is just an outline rather than an exhaustive study of the choice in

signalling the cause-effect relation in English, which the author suggests can be found elsewhere (e.g. Jordan 1995, 1997).

López-Folgado's *Functional variations in the NG premodifiers in written English* comes in for a similar kind of constructive criticism. The paper dwells on the order, the differences and the fuzzy edges existing between different types of Epithets and Classifiers within the NG. Extrapolating Firbas' (1974: 23) *communicative dynamism* to the NG, Pre-Modifiers are said to be arranged along a scalarity of unfocused (given or unstressed) leading to focused (newsworthy, stressed or heavy) information. A certain degree of superficiality is observed in the description and analysis of the various written English sources the author claims to base himself on to account for cross-genre variation. For no explanation is given as regards, for example, the corpus characteristics, the soundness of its choice, or the analytical tools utilised. Nor is it clearly stated which classificatory features of pre-Modifiers are applied in the analysis, or how one is to ascertain the different shades of meaning and fuzzy boundaries implied in 'describing', '(non)-restrictive' and 'narrative' adjectives, because, among other things, no single corpus-record is provided as an illustration.

A nicely organised four section study follows: Downing & Lavid's *Information progression strategies...*, based on Dubois' (1987) reformulation of Daneš' (1974) 'Theory of thematic progression'. Thus, *thematic progression*, i.e. when a Theme that is not new derives from previous Theme(s), is distinguished from *rhemic progression*, i.e. when the Theme derives from previous Rheme(s), and both types have a choice between *simple*, i.e. when they have a single source, or *multiple*, i.e. when they point to more than one source. Daneš' *derived Hyperthematic TP* is also used to refer to Themes in subsequent clauses that are derived from a 'Hypertheme'. After properly describing the methodology and the corpus analysed, the authors give convincing qualitative and quantitative evidence that English forms tend to show mostly derived hyperthematic and thematic TP patterns. By contrast, the instructional notes accompanying Italian and German forms display both the rhemic and the derived hyperthematic TP patterns fairly evenly. Among the reasons adduced stand discourse purpose, the social distance and the social role between text producers and receivers, and the text rhetorical structure. It would be interesting to expand the analysis so as to cover, for example, other languages and other genres.

In *Interpersonal choices in academic work* Eija Ventola examines ten excerpts of (systemic) linguistics papers to illustrate the sociological cline existing between so-called strategies of *Alignment*, used to establish a sense of consensus, and strategies of *Bashing*, resorted to when confrontation is the norm. One of Ventola's intentions is, she claims, to make linguists aware of the areas of Consensus and Confrontation so as to better train students to avoid

Bashing strategies and make them work in the direction of Consensus. Undoubtedly, Ventola's paper does point the way ahead for research in this line. But more definitive statements about the strategies whereby one can sound conciliatory rather than antagonistic should seek to provide a more exhaustive inventory of these devices describing in more detail their realisations and meanings across different genres and/or languages.

Louise J. Ravelli, in turn, addresses the issue of *discourse positioning* taking the Sydney Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) as a case study. Ravelli argues that, because of the institution's desire to maintain its 'position as an elite, privileged site for the art-initiated' (LCAG: 151), the language of the MCA brochures and 'wall texts' falls into the medium-high range of complexity, particularly as regards the variable of Mode and Field (i.e. lexical density, thematic signalling, technical 'obfuscation'). Clearly, the paper demonstrates how linguistic choices work at a variety of levels, 'including that of the very nature and identity of an institution' (*id.*). This hypothesis could be further attested by considering, as the author herself suggests, several other written and spoken texts in the same field and eventually across different genres (Ravelli 1995).

The next contribution examines *language use in computer science*. Meriel Bloor explains that, apart from the relative frequency of abstract nouns as technical terms, a characteristic of traditional scientific prose, the English of computer science (manuals, newsgroups, e-mails) is closer to spoken discourse in that it shows a higher degree of: (1) flexibility (e.g. diagrams and illustrations); (2) interpersonal characteristics (e.g. second person simple present tense with the pronoun 'you', contractions, exclamations or imaginary conversations); (3) colloquialisms (e.g. *growing pains*, *the wonders of*, etc.); and (4) new terminology coined from Old English, rather than Greek or Latin, or derived from metaphorical extensions from the general stock of lexical items (e.g. *action*, *address*). Despite these apparent facilities, the author concedes, computer science texts are difficult for the uninitiated to access, mainly because '[t]he overall picture is still very fluid and difficult to grasp and much on-going research needs to be done to capture the nature of the changes' (LCAG: 169).

Again featuring *scientific discourse*, Garcés-Conejos and Sánchez-Macarro (G & S) investigate *politeness strategies* in the line of Myers' (1989, 1992) empirical research and the theoretical framework of Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and Scollon and Scollon (1995). Even if, despite the title announcing a contrast between *scientific articles* (SA) and *popularisations* (POP), this study draws evidence from POP articles only, it does offer a conspicuous exemplification and classification of different types of *positive and negative politeness strategies* in this genre. G & S conclude that positive politeness strategies seek to create *common ground* in order to make the

members of the *exoteric* or wider scientific community feel a part of the *esoteric* or immediate one, including the POP text itself, which, as a result and unlike SAs, not infrequently evokes personal emotions and feelings. By contrast, negative politeness strategies are reported to convey a sense of *deference* or distance, which confers the esoteric community a place of its own within the whole scientific community mainly through the use of: (1) *impersonalisations* (mostly *nominalisations*), which highlight the result of the research, rather than the people or the process that bring it about, and (2) *hedges* or *pessimistic expressions*, which infuse discourse with tentativeness or freedom of interpretation.

Part I is closed with Pelsmaekers, Braecke and Geluykens' examination of *subordination devices in L2 writing*, deploying basic insights from Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) (Mann & Thompson 1988, 1992). The authors suggest that insufficient exploitation of *subordination devices*, *finite adverbial clauses* in particular, probably due to transfer from the spoken to the written discourse mode, leads Dutch learners of English to produce sentences with *under-integrated* and/or *under-explicated* connections, especially as *regards causal relationships*: cases of non-integration or non-explication, others with explication without integration, instances of over-integration, etc. Research of this kind has far-reaching implications. It shows, on the one hand, that the capacity to exploit the syntactic devices and semantic correlates concerned with sentence arrangement, including not only subordination, but also coordination or asyndetic ordering, is one of the parameters that determine text quality. On the other hand, the paper suggests that this capacity can and must be learned as a conscious option, bearing in mind the pragmatic and textual factors underlying the production and interpretation of texts.

Opening Part II and taking Quirk *et al* (1985: 424 ff.) and Downing & Locke (1992: 518) as a base, Gordon Tucker's *Quality choice and quality control* offers a profound and sytem(at)ic analysis of adjectives in English: where adjectives occur, and the options, constraints and consequences which are involved in their choice. Tucker draws an exhaustive system for the full range of Quality meanings ranging from simplex (adjective only) to complex ones, focusing, in the latter case, on instances and sequences of *quality*, *degree* and *measure temperers*, that is to say, premodifiers within the Quality. One issue that awaits a fuller account is, for example, the individual collocational consequences of Quality senses. And, more incidentally, it is also striking that this paper should be included in Part II on spoken discourse when it neither analyses any spoken evidence at all, nor does it factor out the phonological or phonetic intricacies involved in quality variation across this mode.

This is not the case of Chambon and Simeoni's (Ch & S) paper, which does investigate speech, more precisely *modality in the therapeutic dialogue*.

Ch & S recognise three types of *modophorics*, or means of expressing modality: (1) *grammaticised modality*, concerning the verb in English (mood, aspect, modal auxiliaries) (2) *lexical modophorics* such as *evidentials*, adverbial *highlighters* or *downtoners*, *hedges*, *parentheticals* or *interjections*, and (3) *interclausal modophorics*, ranging from *propositional attitudinal*s ('I think that + p'), to *topicalisers* ('*The thing is...*'), or sentence connectors (*because*, *so*, etc.). In addition, Ch & S distinguish between *open* and *closed* forms of modality: the former make explicit an imposed reality, whereas the latter foreground possible, alternate realities. The paper gives convincing evidence that one of the means whereby therapists conduct the discourse of their clients is through the alternation or the accumulation of open or close expressions of modality. These strategies are shown to produce a variety of effects such as fostering the potential self of the client or placing it in a tentative location, couching conflictual notions with cautions downtoners, or eliciting conflict and difficulty of expression of the client. In order to do full justice to the potential of discourse modality, research should carry on investigating the implementation (morphosyntactic and suprasegmental features) and communicative tasks of modophorics across different and large enough text types.

Pérez-González, for his part, offers a sound explanation of the *conversational phenomena* that may result in the *neglect* of a request for *emergency assistance*. Emergency calls are portrayed as basic *action-orientated exchanges* (request for help/assistance) between two participants, the *caller* (C) and the *caretakers* (CT), involving a succession of *knowledge-orientated* turns that deal with specific aspects of the emergency reported, the trajectory, stages and length of which being controlled by the CT. The paper illustrates that request for service is virtually neglected when one of the parties departs from this *routine dynamics*, most frequently because C wants to cut the CT-interrogative section short in order to accelerate the provision of assistance. A more comprehensive analysis of conversational organisation across genres would undoubtedly help devise efficiency seeking strategies for the management of different types of encounters, which may prove particularly useful with emotionally distressed individuals.

Also concerned with the correlation between interpersonal relationships (social distance) and discourse structuring (the exchange of communicative power), Karen Malcolm compares the *casual conversation of friends and strangers* (two dyads of university women). Roughly, Malcolm contends that 'strangers', or people who have not met before, tend to structure their discourse either in isolated *phases*, i.e. a unit larger than the sentence/utterance including more than the adjacency pair, or in continuous phasal strings, letting discourse evolve gradually in a way which facilitates decoding. On the contrary, 'friends', or people sharing a pool of (extra-)linguistic experiences,

are prone to structure their communication in a discontinuous way, giving up chronological sequencing and explicit referents and using a more complex syntax. While this data-based study reveals valuable findings, it also arises a number of methodological issues. One concerns the supporting evidence. For, instead of supplying the annotated transcripts of the conversations under analysis, a sample which, in order to be quantitatively and qualitative significant should also be bigger and more varied, the paper is constructed upon the author's subjective and *ad hoc* reports on them. Another issue is that a more precise characterisation of 'phase' and of the cues implied could also be useful in order to assess any possible phase-(sub)type, or phase-transition across different types of discourse, lest we assume the rather unlikely premise that 'strangers' or 'friends', vaguely defined as these terms also are, always follow one and the same continuous or discontinuous pattern, respectively.

Robert Veltman, on the other hand, concentrates on the *language of swearing*: its domain and the options it raises such as *ritual* vs. *non-ritual swearing*, *expletive* vs. *invective* swearing, *expressive* vs. *referential* swearing, and within the latter, the choices of *profanities* vs. *corporalities*. It seems, however, that some of these labels and their realisations remain rather opaque or insufficiently described. A case in point is the explanation that the main difference between ritualised swearing and non-ritualised swearing resides in that the ideational element of the latter has become more explicit. Equally vague seems the statement that whereas expletive swearing is self-directed, invective swearing is other-directed. Interestingly, other aspects of swearing are also touched upon such as its ideational, interpersonal, textual and social make-up, all of which point ahead for future work.

Finally, the volume closes with Martin Hewings' revealing study of the English *intonation* of learners within the framework of Brazil's (1997) *discourse intonation model*. The paper contrasts the *systemic choices* of *prominence*, *tone unit length*, and *tone choice* produced in comparable samples of speech by British English native speakers (NS) and by non-native speakers (NNS). Three interesting findings stand out. One is that NNS tend to divide their speech into shorter units so that more words are assigned prosodic prominence, which, in addition, tends to be placed later in the tone unit. Another finding concerns the tendency of learners to adopt the NS use of Falling and Rising tones to mark contextually retrievable and new information, respectively. And thirdly, the data reveal that NNS seem to have difficulty in grasping the NS strong association of lack of confirmation (withholding agreement or approval) with Rising tone, an indication that in English the Falling/Rising opposition is also used for the purpose of reducing social confrontation in social interaction. Data-based research of this kind point the way ahead for studies of (non-native) intonation, either of a descriptive or an

explanatory nature, and corroborate the view that intonation should be given a higher priority in teaching programmes.

**Contents:** Introduction: Meaning as work: Individuals, society and the production of representational resources: Gunter Kress; **Part I:** Resonance in text: Geoff Thompson; Conditional expressions: Meanings and realizations in two genres: Thomas Bloor; Pragmatic, stylistic and grammatical limitations on choice: A study of cause-effect signalling in English: Michael P. Jordan; Functional variations in NG premodifiers in written English: Vicente López Folgado; Information progression strategies in administrative forms: A cross-linguistic study: Angela Downing & Julia Lavid; Interpersonal choices in academic work: Eija Ventola; The consequences of choice: Discourse positioning in an art institution: Louise J. Ravelli; Lexical and grammatical choices in innovative language use in computer science: Meriel Bloor; Scientific research as interaction: Scientific articles vs. popularizations: Pilar Garcés-Conejos & Antonia Sánchez Macarro; Rhetorical relations and subordination in L2 writing: Katja Pelsmaekers, Chris Braecke & Ronald Geluykens; **Part II:** Quality choice and quality control: Gordon Tucker; Modality in the therapeutic dialogue: Adrienne Chambon & Daniel Simeoni; The conversational dynamics of interactional dispute in conflictive calls for emergency assistance: A single case study: Luis Pérez-González; Friends or strangers: Only their phases show for sure: Karen Malcolm; Lars Porsena and my bank manager: A systemic functional study in the semogenesis of the language of swearing: Robert Veltman; Intonation choices in the English of non-native speakers: An explanatory study: Martin Hewings.

María de los Ángeles Gómez González  
Universidade de Santiago de Compostela  
Departamento de Filoloxía Inglesa  
Avda. Castelao s/n  
E- 15782 Santiago de Compostela  
E-mail: iadimly@usc.es

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