

PRIN COLLOQUIUM 2019

**Exploring the discursive creation of
argumentation and ideology in evolving
specialized knowledge domains**

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Plenary speaker

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Researching Interdisciplinary Discourse

This paper considers what is special about the language used in academic discourse identified as ‘interdisciplinary’, specifically research articles in the field of environmental science. The methods reported range from genre analysis of individual texts, through studies of individual words and phrases using concordancing software, to more quantitative, technical approaches to corpus data such as multi-dimensional analysis and topic modelling. The findings point to three main conclusions. Firstly, ‘interdisciplinary’ is a way of describing the readership of a journal rather than its writers. Secondly, researchers who write for an interdisciplinary journal bring with them the practices of their own discipline. As a consequence, interdisciplinary journals incorporate a wider variety of such practices than monodisciplinary journals do. Finally, researchers in this field, as in all fields, construct their identity in their discourse. This identity can be more or less interdisciplinary and can be ‘conciliatory’ or ‘antagonistic’ in its stance towards other disciplines.

The paper relates to a project carried out at the University of Birmingham. The project has raised many questions for us, including: What data should we collect? What methods should we use to analyse it? What does it all mean and does it matter? In the paper I shall give a sense of how these questions were approached as well as what we think the answers are. The paper is therefore about how a project of this kind comes about as well as what it finds.

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The ‘holy grail’ of interdisciplinarity: Challenges in negotiating ‘interpretive repertoires’ and sustaining ‘communities of interest’

Interdisciplinary partnershiping is increasingly being epitomised as desirable and value-added, especially in terms of institutional imperatives and funding prerequisites. Practices differ when choosing the appropriate prefix (inter-, cross-, trans-, multi-) to characterise research that necessitates going beyond one’s own disciplinary and professional circumference. Interdisciplinarity – or whatever term we choose to use – presumes a deep embedding in one’s own discipline prior to crossing the boundaries. Paradoxically, the more one is embedded in one’s discipline and inhabits a specific disciplinary mentality the more the discipline mutates into a ‘terministic screen’ in the Burkean sense. Contested ‘interpretive repertoires’ within the interdisciplinary field then become the norm rather than an exception, which can be understood through the metaphor of ‘the holy grail’.

When applied researchers representing either a single discipline or multiple disciplines approach professional/institutional discourses to engage in societal and practical issues, they bring along with them their ‘communities of practices’ or ‘habitus’, with distinct epistemological and ontological underpinnings, rooted in the source disciplines. It is typical for (inter)discipline-based researchers to grind their own interpretive axes during the high-stakes research process. I explore how a shift from ‘communities of practices’ to ‘communities of interests’ constitutes a fundamental baseline for mitigating the interpretive divide, which acknowledges differences in ontologies and epistemologies across given communities of practices/discourses/interpretations – where one may share ‘interests’ but not ‘practices’, ‘discourses’ and ‘interpretations’. Through sustaining such ‘communities of interests’ we begin to demystify the so-called ‘holy grail’ of interdisciplinarity and overcome the interpretive challenges.

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Copyright & copyleft: communicating knowledge at the interface of law and computer technology

In the Information Age, releasing new information and computer technology products often comes with new licenses and contracts, which have been challenging the traditional conception of private property and the rights granted by *Copyright Law* and *Intellectual Property Law*. To take one example, at the time of writing, the latest step towards updating EU copyright law is the European Parliament's vote on 12 September 2018 to start negotiations on the Copyright Directive proposed by the European Commission in September 2016 (COM/2016/0593 final - 2016/0280 (COD)). Alternating with *copyright* are other (non-proprietary) rights and licenses, including *creative commons*, *copyleft*, *open source*, *non-proprietary*, *permissive* and *free software* licenses. As potential users of (free) content and software distributed under such licenses, the general public should minimally have some generic idea of these rights and licenses. The more restricted web of copyleft enthusiasts and software users-developers in devoted (online) communities, however, should gain a much better understanding of their practical implications and legal underpinnings.

This paper addresses the problem if and in how far knowledge about *copyright* and *copyleft* is represented and communicated (Kastberg, 2010; Ditlevsen, 2011) with the intent of dissemination (Calsamiglia/van Dijk 2004) to this diverse audience in selected online resources that are primarily meant for IT professionals and enthusiasts (the *GNU Project* at <https://www.gnu.org>) or describe their mission as one of educating users and helping them connect to technology and the Internet (*MakeUseOf* at makeuseof.com) and *Technopedia – The IT education site* at technopedia.com). The main emphasis lies in the interaction of layout and interface design (Nielsen 1999; NN/g), content design, and interdiscursive and interlocutive dialogism (Bres 1985; Bres/Nowakowska 2005). One related question concerns the extent to which the very same content reflects and represents the ideology of the copyleft community.

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Textual polyphony in judges' sentencing remarks: voices and registers in violence against women

A courtroom is probably one of the most interesting places to observe discourse in action: conflicts are dealt with, problems are (more or less successfully) solved, and individuals may forfeit their freedom. However, what “goes on in the courtroom” may reach further beyond: thanks to the digital media, general audiences may also have access to the “sentencing remarks”, an interesting phase in the common law system where judges use a number of rhetorical strategies in order to explain the punishment not only to the culprit, but also to the victims, their families and society at large. This legal subgenre has been little analysed from a communicative or rhetorical point of view (with few exceptions, e.g. Robertshaw (2004), from a legal standpoint, studies have focused on specific crimes and offenders (Sullivan 2017; Bouhours & Daly, 2015). In our paper, we intend to concentrate on a specific rhetorical strategy: textual polyphony, i.e. the introduction by the judge (the sole voice in this genre) of “other voices”, reproducing words by victims, families, witnesses or sometimes perpetrators, as a rhetorical device which not only communicates vividness but, through the unfiltered reproduction of selected registers and images, becomes part of the justification for the sentence passed on the offender. Our paper will study a sample of recent cases of violence against women where judges resort to direct speech in order to introduce a variety of registers and thus provide a more vivid depiction of the seriousness of the crime.

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Rhetorical and visual arguments in GMO discourses: arguing ethics and sustainability through the (mis)appropriation of semiotic and discursive resources

This paper investigates the visual and rhetorical resources deployed by competing actors (corporate agri-biotech businesses and anti-GMO activists) in the representation of genetically modified foods and crops, and explores the way in which such resources are exploited for the purposes of arguing the ethics and legitimacy (or lack thereof) of agri-biotech corporations.

Starting from the late 1990s, when the first genetically modified seeds began to be commercialised, agricultural biotechnologies have been the object of sustained criticism on the part of extremely vocal anti-GMO campaigners, who have been quick to capitalise on the mobilising power of the Internet to gain discursive salience. While such opposition has not prevented agri-biotech corporations from successfully marketing their products in many parts of the world, it has also put them under heightened pressure to defend themselves from their opponents' attacks, and to engage in strategic rhetorical action aimed at building consensus around their operations. This has led, on the one hand, to an increase in dialogically-engaged counter-argumentation, and, on the other, to the devising of subtler strategies of neutralisation of oppositional discourses via a reframing of agri-biotech companies as champions of sustainability.

The study analyses visual and textual materials retrieved from the websites of agri-biotech corporations such as Monsanto, Bayer CropScience and Syngenta against the background of 1) materials issued by anti-GMO campaigners and 2) samples of sustainable agriculture discourse drawn from the website of institutions such as FAO and of activist organisations such as La Via Campesina. By virtue of their engagement with highly specialised issues (such as the nature of biotechnologies and the implications of their adoption, or the definition of sustainable agricultural practices), all these materials qualify as examples of knowledge dissemination deployed in higher-order argumentative architectures in the service of opinion-steering and consensus building.

Methodologically, the study relies on theories of argumentation, both visual and rhetorical (Birdsell & Groarke 1996; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004), exploring the way in which semiotics resources (van Leeuwen: 285) are exploited and appropriated in the service of diverging representational purposes (Kress 2010). In particular, it reflects on the ambiguous status of “floating signifiers” (Lévi-Strauss 1968; Laclau 2007) such as sustainability, and on the way in which visual and discursive resources can be rhetorically hijacked for the purpose of establishing powerful objects of agreement (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969/1957) which are then used by the various actors to advance their positions in the discursive struggle over the meaning of sustainability.

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Argumentative Topoi Seen from a Discourse Analytic Perspective. The case of Brexit and Populism in UK Editorials

Topoi have always been at the centre of Argumentation studies and several approaches exist to their classification, all in their way struggling with the tension between comprehensiveness and manageability. Some distinguish among several types of schemes (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, Walton et al 2008), producing very long, fine-grained lists, while others, prevalently informed by logic, identify a limited number of abstract schemes (and subschemes) to which real instances of argumentation can be referred to (van Eemeren et al. 1996). Still others are content-based (Reisigl 2014) and are not worried with classifications at all. This paper considers how some of these approaches can serve the purposes of discourse analysts interested in Argumentation, applying them to the analysis of arguments used pro and against Brexit in editorials published in UK quality newspapers. For the way it was dealt with in the referendum campaign, the debate over Brexit was closely knit with the theme of populism, thus reflecting on the small scale discourses about populism circulating in academic circles and the society at large. Drawing on a previous study on the same theme by Degano and Sicurella (forth), in which recurrent topoi were analysed drawing on a content-based approach, this paper will try to establish connections between the topoi thus identified and more formalized classifications of argument schemes, asking if a convergence is possible.

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Discursive construction of ethics-based framework for public identity: investigative congressional hearings

Public discourse may imply, among other things, the promotion of (self-)representation. Among public discourse community members, politicians and corporate leaders have a prominent role. They need to imbue their utterances with evidence, authority and truth (Chilton 2004), in other words they need to be - or at least sound - ethical, and this seems to be even more evident in case of suspicion of wrongdoing. Investigative congressional hearings are aimed to conduct investigations over supposed misconduct on the part of public officials or private citizens. The heterogeneity of discourses in the four types of hearing - legislative, oversight, confirmation, and investigative (Sevetson n.d.) - is no impediment to either genre classification or recognition (Garzone 2005). The hearings can give researchers the ability to discover whom the Congress is listening, who the players were in an issue and how they positioned themselves in a debate.

However, the subject has not been of much scrutiny on the part of discourse scholars, an attitude somehow contrasting with lay public's general interests and a lost opportunity to gain a unique view into the actors, the interested parties, the issues.

It is the scope of the present study to analyse discursive strategies aimed to construct ethics-based framework for public identity in the opening statements of selected investigative hearings. The strategies are expected to be displayed both by a politician facing a controversial topic (Clinton's possible failures during the Benghazi crisis) and by two highly influential company CEOs whose companies have been under public scrutiny for suspected unethical behaviour.

The methodological framework adopted for the study makes synergic use of the traditional definition of argumentative text (Werlich 1976) combined with a discourse analytical perspective as it is believed that by critical discourse analysis we can become aware of linguistic choices and the arguments that they imply (Charteris-Black 2011).

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Ethics and knowledge perception in prescription drugs commercial in the USA

Advertising prescription drugs in the USA is authorized and controlled by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) that issues guidelines and limitations to the communication of such drugs. This study investigates the discourse that renders the perception of the disease's knowledge and the way the role of the physician is conveyed in the commercials aired on TV in the USA. The diseases range from diabetes to some forms of cancer, cholesterol control, heart diseases and depression and more. The corpus consists of 40 commercials, from 2008 to 2018, advertising different drugs. The analysis is carried out, on the one hand, on the way the linguistic and rhetorical strategies lead promotional discourse (Bhatia 2005; Glinert 2005): it intertwines and aligns with the sensitiveness of the underlying product's selling point. On the other hand, the investigation spreads over the role of the physician, revealing interesting aspects in terms of an implicit loss of his\her scientific independence in the treatment of the diagnosis.

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Social Media, Artificial Intelligence and Civic Engagement. A Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis of the *Facebook Manifesto*

The aim of the essay is to investigate the rhetorical construction of the nearly 6,000-word message posted by Mark Zuckerberg on February 16, 2017 to his personal profile on the social media he co-founded. The post is entitled *Building Global Community* and features an open letter addressed to all Facebook's users where he envisions the strategic role of the platform in technologically enabling the civic-engagement of communities at a global level. The document has been defined by many a political "manifesto" (e.g. Rider and Murakami Wood 2018), since it is a public declaration of the aims Zuckerberg foresees for the social media which is considered the world's most popular social networking site (Statista, 2016). Adopting a critical multimodal perspective (van Leeuwen 2014), I will analyze how verbal and visual codes together with the digital platform's affordances are used to shape the image of Facebook as the "social infrastructure" for the civically-engaged global community of tomorrow. Indeed, it is a complex ideological construct that is articulated linguistically, digitally and multimodally and where a cognitive theory of history, the Habermasian (1996) concept of civic-engagement and the notion of artificial intelligence are discursively interwoven in a frame that depicts social media as the enablers of civic participation.

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The Constitution, the political discourse and the press in China

In March 2018, the National People's Congress of China voted for the adoption of the fifth amendment to the current constitutional text (Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo 2018).

In the five years prior to the vote on the amendment, Xi Jinping delivered a constellation of public speeches, and the Chinese Communist Party and state organs published a series of documents in order to reaffirm the centrality of the Constitution in the country's political life, thus setting the ideological context in which the new text was discussed and adopted. The Constitution hence became one of the keywords of the political discourse and the discursive framework stemming from the central leadership documents echoed in the news production of national and international media.

Through the analysis of a corpus of Chinese newspapers articles, considered as elements of a genre colony (Bhatia 2004; Cap and Okulska 2013; Wodak and Forchtner 2018), this contribution will highlight how the political discourse on the constitution permeated Chinese press texts in selected periods of time between 2012 and 2018.

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Exploring ideological messages in newspaper editorials and news reports on the first human gene-editing case

This paper examines some of the argumentative structures employed in the British newspapers covering the birth of first gene-edited babies. This controversial case elicited a strong public reaction, which generated popularized explanations of the procedure in press, justifications by the scientist responsible and some pro-gene editing persons, and refutation by public and scientific community. The nature of this case and high media attention made its media coverage a privileged place for the analysis of power and ideologies (Fairclough 1995), as well as a fertile ground for the study of argumentation from a pragma-dialectical perspective (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2003).

The study analyses a corpus including British tabloid and broadsheet news reports of the case and editorials. In general, media discourse (Fairclough 1995) widely uses rhetorical strategies and argumentation resources. Whereas editorials are explicitly argumentative, with a complex overlapping

between argumentation, discourse and ideology (Breeze 2016: 2), news reports pursue also the general informative goal of knowledge dissemination and science popularisation. The aim of this paper is to compare the use of argumentation strategies at the level of adverbial and adjectival phrases to formulate an opinion and/or to pass an ideological message (van Dijk 1998) across the genres of news reports and editorials, drawing a demarcation line also between tabloids and broadsheets, where possible. The research uses both qualitative (genre and discourse analysis) and quantitative investigation tools, and makes use of corpus linguistics using the WordSmith Tools 6.0 software for lexical analysis and text search.

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Representing Russia: the role of implicit argumentation and ambiguity

Though Russia's standing with the West has improved since the Cold War period, it is arguably still cast in the role of outsider in the international community (Roberts 2010). In this paper, we explore the role of the press in establishing knowledge claims about Russia.

The media have long exercised the function of forming public opinion about world events (Lippmann 1922), a role which continues in the sophisticated social contexts of modernity (Foerstel 2001). Many students of press discourse have identified patterns of reflected or implicit ideology, despite a purportedly objective stance (e.g. Chomsky 1989, White 2000). Fairclough's 'Soviet threat' example of presupposition, for instance, has parallels in modern press discourse about Russia: BBC News had a recent headline: *Why would Putin want to nuke Florida?* In Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's terms (1983: 48), we are concerned here with argumentation whose effect could be to establish epistemic propositions among readers, such as this last (i.e., that Putin *does* want to nuke Florida).

Our data comes from quality British and American newspapers, news websites of The BBC, Reuters, The Guardian, etc., covering the relations between Russia, the US and the UK. Drawing on critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 1989, Van Dijk 2006; Wodak and Meyer 2001), we explore linguistic means of ambiguity, their pragmatic function and perlocutionary effect. Some of these resources are the lack of factual detail, lexemes with the semantic component 'without proof', indefinite pronouns and epistemic modals. We also consider multimodal artefacts, photographic representations of Russia and its president.

We suggest that people's negative views of Russia and its president (in an extreme form, Russophobia) depend as much on mediated representations of world events (the Skripal case, the Crimea crisis, Putin's perceived Tsarism) as they do on current geopolitical realities; and are accepted as true by virtue of their conformity with the social expectations of westerners, as well as constant repetition.

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Knowledge Sharing and Dissemination on Social Networking Sites: The Case of YouTube

The introduction of the Web 2.0 has brought about a big change in content distribution, as a rigid separation between producer and public no longer exists (Bruns 2008). This also applies to the domain of science communication: whereas in the past it was mainly mainstream media that performed the task of sharing disseminating scientific knowledge to general audiences, now the latter can access this type of information on social networking sites, where professionally- (PGC) and user-generated content (UGC) are equally available. In spite of the fact that they can rely on fewer financial resources as well as on less formal technical training (Welbourne/Grant 2016), amateur users have proven able to raise the interest of lay people, thus becoming an important source of scientific information. The social media platform YouTube is a case in point: it hosts a number of science vlog channels, some of which can count on a remarkable follower base and are extremely popular.

Against this backdrop, this study sets out to investigate how famous science vloggers rhetorically build their online identity and, more specifically, the language and discursive strategies they adopt to create their YouTube persona. In order to reach this aim, an *ad hoc* corpus consisting of YouTube vlogs posted by scholars of scientific disciplines has been collected and the verbal component of these videos has been analyzed from a linguistic perspective. The theoretical framework chosen for this study is computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA), which arguably represents the most suited tool to examine language use as a social practice in digital environments (cf. Herring 1996; 2001). The approach of CMDA is combined with the use of automated interrogation routines where expedient for the purposes of this research, especially with a view to identifying recurrent syntactic patterns and lexical features.

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'I am proud to have served...': argumentation and ideology in political resignation letters

Political resignation letters (PRL) are a traditional genre with a long history and quite specific rhetorical and linguistic requirements. Originally addressed to a more restricted audience, PLR are comparatively short missives that, alongside their formal role as written declarations renouncing ministerial or political positions, also have other communicative purposes. Their writers may use the letters to set out the motivation(s) of their choice to step down, to justify their conduct and to criticize political choices they reject. They can display specific emotions and attitudes, such as anger, regret, recrimination and sincerity, and preempt accusations of betrayal. PLR can also be ways of preparing the ground for a potential political change of direction or comeback.

These days PLR are widely reported on the front pages of the national press and increasingly accessed in their digital version. Thus, they provide their writers with high profile moments where they can use their argumentation to set out their ideology, enabling them to engage with an increasingly wide and varied audience, including past or prospective voters.

This paper will examine a number of recent PRL from the United Kingdom and the United States in order to identify some of the main discursive features and rhetorical strategies deployed by their writers. It will focus on the aims, significance, and possible repercussions of the language used in PLR and examine the developing practices and changing textual dynamics, taking into account the way the narrative shapes and is shaped by the context in which it is embedded. One of the aims is to show how the PRL genre has evolved over the years. The paper would like to suggest that while PLR are a traditional form of communication, they are taking on a new dimension due to the evolving technological affordances.

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Specialised knowledge domains: exploring metadiscourse markers in economics and law research articles

Research on metadiscourse has often focused on cross-disciplinary comparisons and presented intricate findings of how academic writers from different disciplinary communities follow different conventions in knowledge production and communication (Becher/Trowler 2001; Hyland 2005, 2010). Along with diverse classifications of metadiscourse (Ädel/Mauranen 2010), most of the studies on the differential use of metadiscourse in different types of academic writing have shown that it is influenced by the writers' linguistic (e.g. Dahl 2004) and cultural backgrounds (e.g. Li/Wharton 2012), the conventions behind discipline and genre (e.g. Abdi 2002; Hyland 2005; Tse/Hyland 2006, Gillaerts/Velde 2010; Fu/Hyland 2014), and the publishing contexts (e.g. Mur-Dueñas 2011). Given that metadiscursive analysis offers a valuable means of comparing the rhetorical choices of different academic discourse communities and explicating the social and communicative situations in which linguistic choices are made, there is a need to expand analyses of the significance and role of metadiscursive elements in discipline-specific writing practices.

The present paper examines the patterns of interactive and interactional metadiscourse use in the disciplines of Economics and Law, and draws from Hyland's (2005) analytical framework of metadiscourse markers along with other integrative frameworks in approximately a 180,700 word-corpus of social science empirical research articles in the fields. Both distributional and functional analyses of metadiscourse resources show that there are similarities as well as minor, interesting

differences between the two disciplines in terms of how writers structure their texts and present arguments to their readers, and how they draw on their understandings of these resources to report the results of their original study to their readers. It is argued that metadiscourse use is underpinned by the epistemologies behind the existing qualitative and quantitative methods of empirical research as much as by a range of experiential and social variables of the writers, and provide the regulating mechanisms for argument forms, ideological assumptions and knowledge structures in text production. By contributing additional evidence to current published research, this study aims to provide a greater understanding of metadiscourse in the writing practices of the major genre.

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