



## Academic discourse and global publishing: Disciplinary persuasion in changing times

**Ken Hyland & Feng (Kevin) Jian**

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*Academic Discourse and Global Publishing: Disciplinary Persuasion in Changing Times* by Ken Hyland and Feng Jian is at heart a wide-ranging analysis of how certain language factors in academic discourse have changed over the 50 years from 1965 to 2015. The book is divided into 4 parts and 13 chapters, 7 of which have already been published in some form in a range of applied linguistics journals.

The book starts off with an incisive analysis of the background to how academic discourse has evolved in these 50 years. It considers key elements such as the explosion that has occurred in academic publishing, the increasing number of researchers and journals, the growing pressure to publish, increasing specialization and what the authors term “the hardening of hierarchies”, all with the aim of setting the scene against which the results of the more specific analyses reported in the following chapters should be viewed.

Chapter 2 is, in a sense, the heart of the book as here the authors describe the corpora and methods used for these subsequent analyses. It is perhaps worth describing this in detail as readers may want to know what data the analyses are based on. Specifically, the authors took 6 research articles from the same 5 journals from the fields of biology, electrical engineering (“hard” sciences), applied linguistics and sociology (“soft” disciplines) spaced at 25-year intervals over 50 years (1965, 1990 and 2015). The corpus thus compiled consisted of 360 research articles with 2.2 million tokens where the corpora for individual disciplines and specific years averaged from 150 000 tokens (1965) to 243 000 tokens (2015). The names of the actual 20 journals used are also given as are the software tools employed. Both corpus-driven and corpus-based modes and analysis were used.

Part 2 of the book is entitled *Changes in Argument Patterns* and consists of 5 different chapters. The first of these chapters (chapter 3) is based on Biber’s

(1998) multidimensional analysis and explores how the texts have changed based on 5 different dimensions (involved vs informational production, narrative vs non-narrative concerns, situation-dependent vs elaborated reference, overt expression of persuasion and abstract vs non-abstract information). Information is also given on how argument functions have changed over the 50 years studied. Chapter 4 analyzes changes in cohesion and coherence through the study of attended and unattended *this* whereas chapters 5 and 6 move on to the question of citations. Chapter 5 looks at how citation practices have changed with a particular focus on numbers and types of citation, use of different reporting verbs and reporting activities and evaluation whilst chapter 6 deals exclusively with the topic of self-citation. Changing tack, the last chapter in this section (chapter 7) deals with lexical bundles – specifically how 4-grams have changed both in content and function over the 50 years.

Part 3 of the book is dedicated to analyzing changes in stance and engagement. Chapter 8 looks at the changing patterns in stance with a particular focus on evidentiality, affect and presence. Chapter 9 continues in this vein with an in-depth analysis of *evaluative that* while chapter 9 gets to grips with changes in engagement, specifically the issues of reader mention, use of questions, knowledge, asides and directives. A useful list of engagement features is also included. Chapter 11 dives into the matter of changes in the rhetoric self, essentially a study how the use of the pronoun *we* has changed over the period studied. Finally, this part ends with the authors posing the question of whether academic discourse has become more informal. Informality is defined and a list of typical features is given and then the authors proceed to analyze how their use has evolved.

Part 4 of the book is an epilogue (*Pulling it all together*) where the authors attempt to do just that – bring all the threads of their extensive research together in an attempt to draw some overall conclusions.

It is patently clear that this book is essential reading for all those involved in researching academic discourse. The range of different analytical approaches and the extent of analysis are exemplary. Even if the purely diachronic aspect of the book is not the reader's main concern, as may be the case for classroom-based practitioners, the book still provides essential information on many core aspects of academic discourse as it is currently used. This is not to say, however, that the book offers definitive answers to all the questions it poses. The authors themselves highlight that the chapters in the

book “do add up to a neat and definitive picture of the current state of scholarship in published texts” (p. 271) and they also clearly acknowledge that “more studies of more disciplines and of more features are needed to support the changes we have found and confirm whether they apply more generally across the academy” (p. 232). To this wish list I would like to add the pressing need to address some of the key methodological issues in this type of research. Foremost among these is the issue of intra-genre variability, which is intrinsically linked to the matter of corpus size and representativeness. It is, in essence, an empirical question how far a sample of just 30 research articles in say, biology, can be considered to be representative of the whole discipline for any one point in time. Such issues should not be eschewed but addressed directly. Key factors such as sample sizes need to be justified, not merely plucked out of thin air. This will most likely be accompanied by changes in reporting figures with a move away from just giving frequencies – a strategy already highlighted as being less than optimal (Gries 2006) – and the inclusion of further data such as margins of error or confidence intervals. This is not to detract from the studies included in this book but does explain why the general conclusions it reaches may be more reliable than those for specific disciplines. Yet, as I have said, the authors are well aware of this situation and this is why their work should be seen above all as a firm and fertile starting point for many future studies. A PhD or two anyone?

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