



Accounting for the Influence of
Epistemology on Research
Writing: The Occluded
Dimension

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Overview

Part 1: Project

- aims
- Its theoretical basis in Ferguson's (1997) three intersecting domains
- academic language studies and the construct validity problem

Part 2: Example

- Communication Studies – some preliminary exploration of influences on language

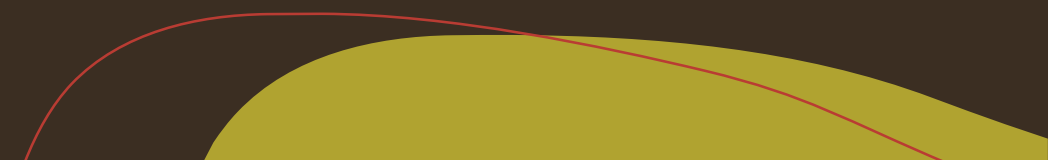


Part 1: The Project



Overall Aim of the Project

To identify the areas of knowledge and skill required for a comprehensive operationalization of disciplinary academic language.



Ferguson's (1997) three areas of knowledge of an academic discipline

a discipline's:

- culture and values
- epistemology
- characteristic discourse and genres

Disciplinary Academic Language

*disciplinary communication **integrates** knowledge of:*

- interactions (sociological & anthropological knowledge)
- epistemology (philosophical knowledge)
- discourse and textual practices and artefacts (discursive & linguistic knowledge)

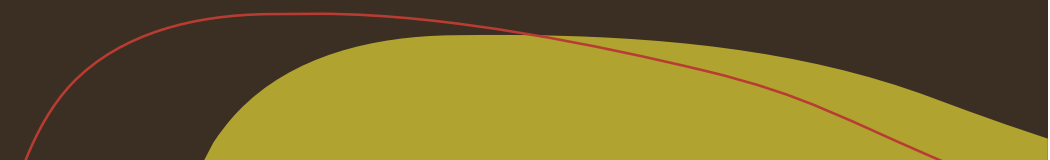
The Construct Validity Problem in Academic Language Studies

- *construct validity* – researcher agreement on the operationalization of the construct
- academic language research streams – little agreement on operationalizing the construct
 - *some focus on the social*
 - *some focus on the textual and linguistic*
 - *little interest in the epistemological*
 - *none integrates all three*



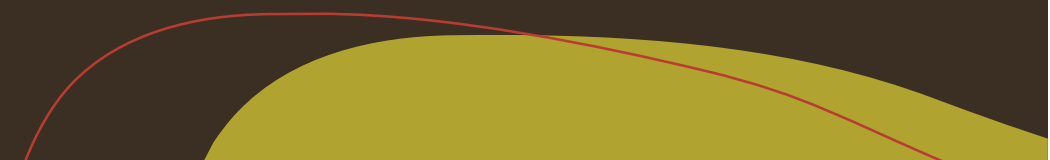
Part 2: Example

*Some preliminary work on academic language in the discipline of
'Communication Studies'*



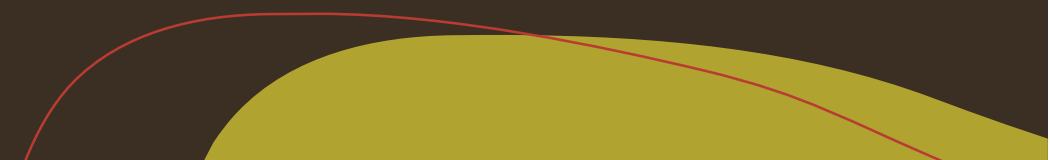


Communication Studies

- social dimensions
 - epistemologies
 - discourse and texts
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Exploring the Social Dimension of the Field

- history
 - communities
 - diversities of theory and research
 - debates
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Ontology and Epistemology

- communication as a process - the transmission of messages
 - *large-scale audience surveys*
 - *quantitative data*
 - *content analysis*
- communication as the use of semiotics
 - *critical discourse analysis applied to texts (focus on lexis)*
 - *multi-modal analysis applied to images, screen and virtual media*

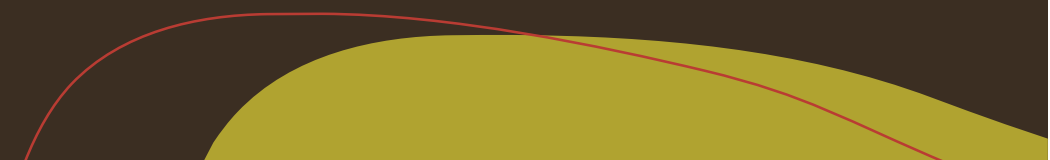


Epistemology and the Discursive Dimension

Case Building in Communication Studies Journal Articles

Aim

To examine the influence of epistemology on the discursive construction of a larger academic argument or case



Research of Disinformation: The Sample

the ten articles:

- investigated some aspect of the issue of 'disinformation' (fake news) in mainstream and social media
- were published within the last four years
- appeared in peer-reviewed, communication research journals endorsed by the US *National Communication Association* (NCA)

The Disinformation Studies: Epistemology

- five studies – positivist, surveys, quantitative data
- five studies – interpretive, case studies or ethnographic interviews, qualitative data

The Articles

Positivist Articles

Garrett, R. K., Long, J. A., & Jeong, M. S. (2019). From partisan media to misperception: Affective polarization as mediator. *Journal of Communication*, 69(5), 490-512.

Hameleers, M., & Minihold, S. (2020). Constructing discourses on (un) truthfulness: Attributions of reality, misinformation, and disinformation by politicians in a comparative social media setting. *Communication Research*, 0093650220982762.

Hjorth, F., & Adler-Nissen, R. (2019). Ideological asymmetry in the reach of pro-Russian digital disinformation to United States audiences. *Journal of Communication*, 69(2), 168-192.

Wells, C., Zhang, Y., Lukito, J., & Pevehouse, J. C. (2020). Modeling the formation of attentive publics in social media: the case of Donald Trump. *Mass Communication and Society*, 23(2), 181-205.

Zhang, Y., Lukito, J., Su, M. H., Suk, J., Xia, Y., Kim, S. J., . & Wells, C. (2021). Assembling the networks and audiences of disinformation: How successful Russian IRA Twitter accounts built their followings, 2015-2017. *Journal of Communication*, 71(2), 305-331.

Interpretive Articles

Baker, S. A., & Walsh, M. J. (2022). 'A mother's intuition: it's real and we have to believe in it': how the maternal is used to promote vaccine refusal on Instagram. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-18.

Graves, L. (2017). Anatomy of a fact check: Objective practice and the contested epistemology of fact checking. *Communication, culture & critique*, 10(3), 518-537.

Hameleers, M. (2019). The populism of online communities: Constructing the boundary between "blameless" people and "culpable" others. *Communication Culture & Critique*, 12(1), 147-165.

Riedl, M. J., Strover, S., Cao, T., Choi, J. R., Limov, B., & Schnell, M. (2021). Reverse-engineering political protest: the Russian Internet Research Agency in the Heart of Texas. *Information, Communication & Society*, 1-18.

Xia, Y., Lukito, J., Zhang, Y., Wells, C., Kim, S. J., & Tong, C. (2019). Disinformation, performed: Self-presentation of a Russian IRA account on Twitter. *Information, Communication & Society*, 22(11), 1646-1664.

The Social Dimension

- overall social concern about disinformation through public media (mainstream, social)
- some issues mentioned in the sample were:
 - effects of partisan media; affective polarization; partisan media's harmful influence; causes of flows of disinformation; disinformation from polarized media; the spread of dishonest, incorrect information; how the discourse of untruthfulness is shaped; information manipulation; decentralized, fragmented and asymmetrically polarized media; communication untruthfulness; incongruent versions of reality; propagandistic divisive appeals*



How does epistemology shape discourse and text?



Assumptions of Positivist Research

- knowledge as absolute and stable (*realist* ontology)
- can be associated with determinism (the search for cause/effect relationships)
- based on the belief that there are general laws governing behaviour
- characterised by use of the *scientific method* - combining induction and deduction to establish general laws explaining human behaviour (*nomothetic*)
- associated with *quantitative* (numerically-based) methods.

Setting out the Case in the Introduction

Positivist Articles

- situation (context)
- problem (involving causality)
- research presented as a solution

Closing the Case in the Discussion

Positivist Articles

- summary of findings (confirmation or refutation of cause/effect relationships examined)
- limitations
- implications

Assumptions of Interpretive Research

- based on the belief that there is considerable personal freedom in relation to behaviour
- emphasises the individual rather than the group
- examines how the individual creates, modifies and interprets the world
- sees knowledge as relative depending on circumstances rather than absolute
- tends to use qualitative (non-numerical) rather than quantitative methods

Setting out the Case in the Introduction

Interpretive Articles

- description of a phenomenon + information gap
- research goals for investigating the phenomenon

Closing the Case in the Discussion

Interpretive Articles

extended essays, thesis statement(s) supported by points, which may be:

- findings
- implications of findings

Some preliminary thoughts so far

- understanding academic language as it is used in a disciplinary context requires a holistic approach
- disciplinary language may be shaped by different macro-level influences – social, epistemological, discursive
- a case for considering how such macro-level influences shape disciplinary communication



to be continued . . .



References

Ferguson, G. (1997). Teacher Education and LSP: The Role of Specialized Knowledge. In R. Howard and G. Brown (Eds.). *Teacher Education for Languages for Specific Purposes* (pp. 80-89) Multilingual Matters.