

Reseñas/Book Reviews



Certainty and Doubt in Academic Discourse: Epistemic Modality Markers in English and Polish Linguistics Articles.

Krystyna Warchał.

Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2015. 311 pages. ISBN:978-83-8012-455-4

Certainty and Doubt in Academic Discourse sets out to provide a close and careful examination of the use of modality in peer-reviewed journal articles in the field of applied linguistics. The subtitle *Epistemic Modality Markers in English and Polish Linguistics Articles* hints at the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural analysis of the semantic category of epistemicity in this research genre in English and Polish. The volume successfully accomplishes the goals established in the Introduction. It sheds some light on the differences and similarities between English and Polish articles regarding: the frequency of use and categories of epistemic markers, the epistemic modal values, and the distribution of markers in article sections.

The book is organized into five chapters, which perfectly sets the presentation of empirical research. The organization of the chapters gives cohesion to this well written volume, very approachable also in style. The first two chapters provide a thorough review of up-to-date literature on “academic discourse and its rhetoric” and on “linguistic modality”. Chapter one sets the tone by offering a general overview of academic discourse and its complexity. The author provides a useful reflection on the cultural factor in academic discourse and a detailed review of previous studies in English and Polish academic discourse. Chapter two features an excellent and careful summary of the state of art in linguistic modality. It offers an introduction to this concept from different approaches, and revises types of modality and values. The chapter also focuses on epistemic modality markers in English and Polish, and gives a brief review of previous research of modality in academic discourse. The reader will welcome the Concluding Remarks

sections that close these chapters, which present a comprehensive summary of them.

Chapter three introduces the empirical research, the aims, the corpus and how the analysis, drawn on studies of metadiscourse and evaluation, was done. The balanced corpus of four hundred articles written in English and Polish is defined and the corpus size fully justified. It can be inferred that the English sub-corpus is comprised by English as a lingua franca (ELF) articles, as it is claimed that authors have a native-like command of English. This distinctive feature of the sub-corpus could, in my opinion, be clearly stated to avoid any misinterpretation of the variety of academic English under examination, since relatively recent studies have shown differences between ELF and native English academic discourse (see e.g. Mauranen, 2012). Personally, I would have liked to know more details about the selection of the papers of the two sub-corpora. For example, it would be interesting to know the expertise of the writers and their position in academia. One could expect that the frequency of use of the epistemic markers and the epistemic modal values that senior and junior scholars use could be different. Substantial academic production, an extensive experience in writing research articles, and the level of recognition of the researcher by the academic community could influence the expression of (un)certainty in the articles. An ethnographic perspective, thus, could possibly guarantee a suitable *tertium comparationis* for the contrastive analysis.

The results are thoroughly presented and discussed in chapter four, which is organized in three sections according to the epistemic modal value (high, middle, or low). Each section presents the outcomes of the analysis of the English and Polish articles, as well as a final in-depth discussion of the contrastive study regarding the frequency of use of epistemic markers, their semantic categories and modal values, the distribution of the markers in the article sections (in general and by categories and modal values), among others. I find particularly useful the list of the main points of difference, between the two sub-corpora that Warchał includes at the end of each discussion. The Results and Discussion are illustrated with plenty of helpful contextualized examples. However, the visual representations in pie and bar charts and tables may seem confusing, as in some occasions the units are not indicated on the visuals. The reader will find results expressed in actual number of records or percentages, figures normalized to 1 million words or calculated per ten thousand words. The use of only the number of records, that is, absolute numbers, can be misleading. This is the case of the analysis

of the distribution of the different expressions of modal values in article sections, where results show a predominant concentration of markers in the main body.

The final chapter gives a general insightful overview of the study, providing clear answers to the research questions. The tendency observed is that the epistemic evaluation is not marked with the same frequency in both languages, as it is conspicuously higher in the English articles. Implicit realizations prevail over explicit ones in both languages, and subjectivity is higher in English. The frequency of the three modal values (high, middle, and low) also differs in the two sub-corpora. In English, low-value evaluation is more frequent; whereas in Polish, middle-value epistemic modality is more frequent. Warchał gives ample justification to the predominant use of epistemic modality and low-value markers by English authors. This justification is based on a higher authorial presence, as well as a higher dialogic involvement with the reader, and on a model of face-maintenance that may contribute to writer's strategic choices which, as the author perfectly argues, is linked to culture. Regarding categories, modal verbs and modal modifiers prevail in both sub-corpora, modal verbs being higher in English and modal modifiers in Polish; however, the analysis of the particular modal values reveals significant differences in terms of the semantic categories employed. The distribution of epistemic markers across sections per 10,000 words shows these are more frequently used in the Conclusion section of the articles in both languages, a result that contradicts findings in chapter four presented in absolute numbers and that is acknowledged by the author.

These points aside, *Certainty and Doubt in Academic Discourse* represents an insightful, thoroughly excellent work. While the book aims at a specific audience interested in cultural-based and discipline-based academic written discourse, and epistemic modality from a cross-linguistic and cross-cultural perspective, it would come into its own as a useful resource on academic writing courses for doctoral students in English as a lingua franca and in Polish, as it offers a comprehensive introductory overview of academic discourse and linguistic modality, as well as plenty of contextualized actual examples of the use and functions of markers of (un)certainty in linguistics articles.

Received 21 February 2018
Accepted 22 February 2018

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