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## **Introduction**

Academic language has the same functions as other specific-purpose languages. It is engineered to facilitate unambiguous specialist communication, and at the same time serves as a marker of group membership, and (mainly unintentionally) as a barrier to communication with outsiders. Kalverkämper (1996) has an attractive metaphor. He presents a discipline or specialism (*Fach*) as an enclosed area in which specialists can talk to each other. He points out that such an area might be enclosed by a fence, traditionally perhaps made of wattle-and-daub (*Fachwerk*), and that the existence of such an opaque fence leads to calls for transparency and the breaking-down of barriers.

The articles in this special section on academic language deal with several very different kinds of academic language, but all are concerned with the rules for special language and the relation between the knowledge of insiders and outsiders. All look at students, from undergraduates who are really outsiders starting to mimic the language of insiders, via post-graduates becoming specialists, to a doctoral student who, in publishing an article, undergoes a rite of passage into full insider status.

Two articles deal with the special types of intertextuality characteristic of written academic discourse, which typically demands that extensive use be made of other texts ('the literature') but at same time has draconian sanctions against illegitimate use ('plagiarism'). Students writing in a foreign language often seem to copy, whether they are European exchange students on their own continent or East Asians working in a culturally very alien environment. LoCastro and Mayumi show that Japanese university students, or at least undergraduates, writing in English copy in ways that are not legitimate, and they show that only some of these ways are comparable with the deceptive plagiarism not uncommon among Western students writing in their own language. The most striking observation is that their intertextuality practices seem to have been similar whether they were writing in English or Japanese. All the same, their particular practices as they try to cross the fence into academic discourse in a foreign language are not simply due to their coming from a culture

*Hermes, Journal of Linguistics no. 28-2002*

with different traditions, or to their having to write in a foreign language, or to lack of training, or to criminal intent, but to a complex interaction of these factors.

Crocker and Shaw examine attitudes to intertextuality in the practice of (British) academic staff and postgraduate international students in a British university. Finding that some plagiaristic practices are condoned and others condemned by both parties, they develop a two-dimensional model in which intertextuality is legitimate or illegitimate in one dimension and effective or ineffective in the other. The ineffective practices mark the writer as belonging outside the fence of the specialism, and the effective ones are the markers of insider status. Practices which are effective but illegitimate mean that the writer appears to be an insider but has not done the work necessary.

Cutting looks at insider status as manifested in the development of 'specialist' reference in the vocabulary of the spoken language (L1) of a group of British postgraduate students. As the group develops into a specialist community united around a single set of activities and demands, it develops a spoken 'discourse for specific purposes'. Although this is an atypical LSP, being spoken and informal, it shares with other LSPs, the characteristic that ordinary words acquire specific interpretations depending on a shared frame of reference. Cutting shows empirically how opaque this vocabulary is to eavesdroppers who are to various degrees outsiders, and thus shows that the vocabulary she is examining shares the LSP functions of facilitating insider communication and forming an opaque fence towards outsiders.

Dressen considers the roles of silence in academic discourse, showing the interplay of conventionalised silences, which reflect the insiders' common sense, and unpredictable ones, which are intended by the writer to carry a particular meaning. She presents a hierarchy of the types of silence typical of academic discourse, illustrating the paradox that the most constrained text-types often offer the greatest opportunities for subtle communication. She gives an account of the developing expression of a geological observation from French-language field notes through a conference presentation to an English-language published article which is both fascinating in itself and illustrates the pressure on novice insiders to conform to the silences inherent in the academic discourse of their discipline. A significant silence in Dressen's own article is the absence of

discussion of the switch of languages, which has perhaps become part of the common-sense of many specialist fields.

### **Literatur**

Kalverkämper, H. (1996). Im Zentrum der Interessen: Fachkommunikation als Leitgrösse.  
*Hermes* 16. 117-176.

