

REVIEWS

Warchał, K. (2015) *Certainty and Doubt in Academic Discourse: Epistemic Modality Markers*. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego. 311 pp.

It is now generally acknowledged that epistemic modality is a core concern of English for Academic Purposes researchers, as it is an important rhetorical device allowing authors to modify the degree of certainty they opt for when presenting their views and claims and to reduce the risk of criticism from their peers. Warchał's monograph is a timely, valuable contribution to the dynamically developing cross-cultural research into linguistic markers of epistemic modality in academic discourse. Its goal is to identify culture-specific features in the way in which members of the Polish and international Anglophone linguistics discourse communities generate and disseminate disciplinary knowledge. To achieve this objective, the author has carried out a thorough corpus-based contrastive analysis of the realization, frequency and distribution of epistemic modality expressions across rhetorical units in Polish and Anglophone linguistics research articles. The findings of the study will undoubtedly be highly relevant to researchers in the field of English for Academic Purposes, Applied linguistics and teachers and students interested in cross-cultural variation in academic discourse.

The book comprises a short introduction and five chapters. The first three chapters lay down the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study, Chapter 4 presents the findings and the conclusive final chapter summarises the findings and provides interpretative comments on the reasons for the existing variation in the use of epistemic markers in Anglophone and Polish research articles.

Chapter 1 *Academic discourse and its rhetoric* discusses what academic discourse is, introduces the notion of academic discourse community and sketches its genres and values. In line with the Bakhtinian tradition, Warchał adopts an essentially polyphonic view of the phenomenon holding that meanings in academic discourse “emerge as a result of complex interactions and negotiation between academic authors, their readers, and other authors and researchers working on similar problems but not necessarily operating with the same methodologies or within one theoretical paradigm” (p. 13). The study draws on contrastive rhetoric (Kaplan 1987, Connor 1996) and the corpus, text and genre analysis frameworks; however, it does not fully embrace the more dynamic context-sensitive intercultural rhetoric approach (Connor 2004), which would allow for deeper insights into processes, motives and purposes of writing.

The core part of the chapter reviews previous research on English and Polish academic discourses to establish a context for the rest of the book. The focus is on the diverging cultural traditions and audience expectations related to a large extent to the differences between the Saxonian and Teutonic intellectual style. While outlining the main strands of research into academic discourse, Warchał draws on several previous cross-cultural studies (e.g. Čmejrková 1996, Fløttum et al. 2006, Shaw 2003, Vassileva 1997) to argue that the linguistic realisations of epistemicity tend to vary across linguacultural backgrounds.

Chapter 2 *Linguistic modality* takes a close look at epistemic modality and presents a comprehensive overview of the main approaches to this complex phenomenon. After delineating the concepts of mood and modality, Warchał draws on a wide range of studies (e.g. Bybee & Fleischman 1995, Lyons 1977, Nuyts 2001, Palmer 2001, Talmy 2000, Verstraete 2001) in a competent discussion of the relation of modality to propositional content, subjectivity, the realis/irrealis distinction and relevance. The detailed account of the existing variation in the categorisation of modal meanings (deontic/epistemic distinction, root/epistemic distinction) allows Warchał to conclude that “compared to other modal subdomains, epistemic modality is relatively well-defined and uncontroversial” (p. 83), despite its problematic relation to evidentiality. What is particularly important for this study is the scalar view of modality (Halliday 1985), which assumes that modal values range from high through medium to low and interact with other modal variables such as orientation (subjective or objective) and realisation (explicit or implicit). The chapter also includes a review of the typical realisations of modality in English and Polish, which has clear pedagogical applications as it has the potential to inform a contrastive approach to the study of modality. The closing insightful discussion of previous research on modality in academic discourse undertaken through the lens of genre analysis, cross-disciplinary, cross-linguistic and inter-cultural variation, outlines the distinctive functions of epistemic modality, such as expressing evaluation, stance, or hedging.

The corpus material under investigation is introduced in Chapter 3 *The project*. The corpus (400 research articles; 2.1 million words) is well-selected to represent the writing habits of Anglophone and Polish linguists at the beginning of the 21st century. It is sub-divided into two comparable sub-corpora each comprising 200 research articles: the English-language sub-corpus consists of research articles published in international journals and the Polish-language sub-corpus includes research articles published in high-ranked national journals. Adopting a top-down approach, the study undertakes to compare the frequency of occurrence of a list of selected epistemic markers across the rhetorical parts

of Anglophone and Polish research articles, focusing on (i) the representation of the categories of markers functioning as exponents of particular modal values, (ii) variation in the distribution of high, middle and low confidence modality markers, (iii) tendencies in clustering of modal markers in research article sections, and (iv) differences in what tends to be epistemically qualified in the two sub-corpora.

The results of the corpus-based analysis are presented in Chapter 4 *Markers of (un)certainly in English and Polish linguistics articles*. Marked quantitative differences between the two sub-corpora were found in the frequency of use of epistemic modality markers, the preference towards the conveyance of various modal values, their realization and distribution across the sections of research articles. The findings demonstrate that overall Anglophone authors signal epistemic stance considerably more frequently than Polish linguists; this divergence was found to be most striking in the case of high-modal values. Another significant difference concerns the prominence of modal values: while in Anglophone texts the most frequently marked modal value is low, in Polish articles it is the middle modal value that shows the highest rate of occurrence. Epistemic modality markers conveying all modal values peak in the conclusion sections of both sub-corpora; however, their distribution across the introduction and main body of the articles subtly varies. There is a marked tendency towards implicit epistemic evaluation in both sub-corpora, whereas in terms of orientation the preferences diverge, as Anglophone articles prioritize subjective orientation as opposed to Polish articles where objective orientation prevails. As to categories of epistemic markers, Anglophone authors convey epistemicity predominantly by modal and quasi-modal verbs and considerably less frequently by modal modifiers; by contrast, in Polish articles modal modifiers and modal verbs partake approximately equally in the realization of epistemic modality (lexical verbs and structures with nouns and adjectives were found to be marginal in both corpora). These findings bring valuable insights into variation in rhetorical practices across linguacultural backgrounds. It should be mentioned, however, that the discussion of these findings could have been strengthened by some interpretative comments offering explanations for the existing similarities and differences in the use of epistemic markers in the two sub-corpora.

The closing Chapter 5 *Conclusions* summarises the findings of the contrastive analysis returning to the main objectives of the research formulated in Chapter 3. The last two pages of the book finally suggest some possible factors responsible for the divergences between the use of epistemic modality in Anglophone and Polish research articles. According to Warchał, and in agreement with previous intercultural rhetoric research, these are the ways in which authorial presence,

dialogical involvement and face-work are treated, as well as some generic differences in the structure of Anglophone and Polish research articles.

In conclusion, I believe that *Certainty and Doubt in Academic Discourse: Epistemic Modality Markers* is a valuable addition to the field of academic discourse studies from the perspective of cross-cultural rhetoric. The merit of the book lies in the detailed contrastive analysis of epistemic modality markers in Anglophone and Polish research articles, which suggests possible directions for future research in the field of contrastive studies of academic discourse in different linguacultural contexts.

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