ABSTRACT:

Polyphonic constructions as epistemic and evaluative qualifications in research articles

In this paper I will argue that the use of polyphonic expressions represents an important dimension of the evaluative perspective in academic discourse. Such expressions indicate epistemic as well as evaluative qualifications in different languages and different disciplines.

The present paper is part of the KIAP project (Cultural Identity in Academic Prose: national versus discipline-specific; see www.hit.uib.no/kiap) where the activities are based on the following key issue: Can cultural identities be identified in scientific discourse, and, if so, are these identities national or discipline-specific in nature? We attempt to answer this question through a doubly contrastive study of Norwegian, English and French research articles within the fields of medicine, economics and linguistics. The project is linguistically based and takes as its point of departure analyses of some selected linguistic features (which primarily may be linked to argumentation). More specifically, we study
1) how the article author manifests him-/herself in the text,
2) how works by other researchers are reflected, and
3) how the author's attitudes are expressed, through the presentation and promotion of his or her own research (epistemic axis and evaluative axis).

The paper is directly related to the last question (3), where we take as a point of departure the notion of qualification defined as explicit characterisation of the propositional content, divided in two main parts: epistemic qualifications (along the axis true/false) and evaluative qualifications (along the axis good/bad). Thus the question related to 3) above can be specified as follows:

a) How does the author present his or her own research (epistemic qualifications), and
b) How does the author ”sell” his or her own research (evaluative qualifications).

These questions may of course be answered to a certain extent by studying hedges and lexical choice. In the present paper, however, I will examine qualifications in a polyphonic perspective. My point of departure is a linguistic conception of polyphony (quite different from the Bakhtinian concept), inspired by the work done within the Nordic project Linguistic and literary polyphony (see www.hum.au.dk/romansk/polyfoni), where polyphony is considered as the manifestation of several voices (or points of view) in one and the same utterance. In fact, the linguistic theory of polyphony provides a fruitful escape from the well-established idea of the uniqueness of the speaking subject. With a polyphonic conception of meaning, it is essential to demonstrate how the presence of several voices or points of view are signalled in discourse.

The relevance of the polyphonic perspective in the present context is related to the fact that the author may set up a polyphonic play indicating epistemic and/or evaluative qualifications of both his or her own voices and others’ voices. Different voices are given the floor, if not explicitly (for example by name and year of publication), then by some distinctive marks signalling polyphony. This is a play which the author of course directs in his or her own way and which
represents a subtle way of qualification, where the source of the qualified proposition is not necessarily explicit. If we take an example like,

_The research article is not an interesting object of study_,

two points of view are presented in this utterance, one saying that ‘the research article _is_ an interesting object of study’ and another saying that ‘this is not valid’. The isolated utterance does not indicate who is the source of the first point of view, it might or might not be identified by the context. For the interpretation of the utterance, it is of course important to try to determine the different points of view which are manifested and to identify the discourse individuals that are responsible for or constitute the origin of these points of view (the author, another specific researcher, the scientific community, the doxa, etc.).

In my paper I will present such polyphonic plays by studying a selection of polyphonic expressions like the following (for practical reasons the expressions are taken from English here):

- the syntactic (and polemic) negation _not_, indicating a strong epistemic qualification of rejection
  - the adverbs _perhaps_ and _maybe_, indicating a mild epistemic qualification of uncertainty,

- connectives like _even if, although, however_, indicating evaluative qualifications of concession or condition,
- connectives like _but_, indicating evaluative qualifications of contrast or concession
- connectives like _hence, thus_, indicating evaluative qualifications of result or conclusion.

Although there are differences (syntactic/semantic/pragmatic) between these items and their corresponding items in other languages, they have a polyphonic value which is similar enough to be compared - and we find them in all disciplines.

The results of the polyphonic analyses undertaken will contribute to the modification of the traditional conceptions according to which “hard” disciplines are objective, non-expressive and non-evaluative and “soft” disciplines the opposite. The use of polyphonic expressions will show that this kind of qualification constitutes a common and characteristic feature of the research article – independently of language and discipline.