

The Discursive
Construal of Trust
in the Dynamics of
Knowledge Diffusion

The Discursive Construal of Trust in the Dynamics of Knowledge Diffusion

Edited by

Rita Salvi and Judith Turnbull

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Diffusion

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PREFACE

It is a great pleasure to write a preface to this volume. First of all, it brings together two aspects of discourse that I find particularly stimulating objects of study: the notion of discursive construal of trust and that of the diffusion of knowledge. Both aspects are becoming increasingly central to professional and organizational communication, especially in its involvement with communities, but they can be seen to play a major role in more personal relationships too. Whether we are talking of political communication, corporate communication, financial reporting, promoting cultural heritage or more personal relations such as coaching events, assessment reports and – “the most critical domain” – medical communication, trust is an essential element of knowledge sharing. The volume manages to cover this wide range of communicative situations centring on how the construal of trust goes hand in hand with re-contextualizing information for the purpose. The collection of papers represents an attempt to develop both notions, but particularly to see how trust building, maintaining and repairing (Fuoli and Paradis 2014) can be seen as instrumental to the diffusion of knowledge in the various fields.

Building a relation of trust and constructing one’s own image in terms of caring and expertise often become essential elements in professional communication in a knowledge-based society. If trust is clearly a dynamic interpersonal construct, typically negotiated through discourse, the speaker’s image is also constructed discursively and in different ways according to the situation. Both trust and image are easily undermined and can be repaired by modifying one’s behaviour: they are negotiated and can be renegotiated through discourse. Constructing and communicating a trustworthy discourse identity often goes together with constructing and conveying an authoritative and a caring identity.

The main purpose of this volume is to improve our understanding of the discursive and pragmatic dynamics of how these identities and relations are built in discourse, keeping in mind a wide enough range of contexts that can illuminate the overarching principles. Improving our understanding means first of all keeping in mind the need to pin down how language choice can be related to the needs of re-contextualizing knowledge or to the needs of constructing, repairing and maintaining trust and image.

Methodologically speaking, the chapters are quite diverse: the readers will not find a unitary approach to the study of trust and knowledge dissemination, but what they will find is a clear representation of the existing range of interests and fields of application. And beyond that, the chapters share a common interest in the study of language in use, in the focus on specific communicative situations and in combining qualitative and quantitative research in the study of discursive constructs.

Another reason that makes me happy to write this preface is that the volume witnesses collaboration between different universities, involving scholars at different stages in their academic career. This may sound slightly unorthodox in a preface, but I think it should not pass unnoticed: personal development and innovative ideas originate from contamination, dialogue across institutions and across generations and I am proud to say that this dialogue is exactly what originated the seminar, organized by Rita Salvi at the University of Rome “Sapienza”, that then developed into the volume.

With this dialogue in mind, I dare say that the volume also witnesses the growth of the CLAVIER (Corpus and Language Variation in English Research) centre into a wider, more inclusive group of researchers with a focus on corpus linguistics and language variation in a discourse perspective. CLAVIER is an interuniversity research centre currently involving the Universities of Bari, Bergamo, Florence, Milan, Modena and Reggio Emilia, “Sapienza” Rome, Siena and Trieste. Originating from collaboration between scholars in English research, CLAVIER has now extended its scope to other languages, including members working on Chinese, French, Italian, German, Spanish and Russian, in the belief that cross-linguistic contrast illuminates peculiarities and commonalities.

It is also our belief that cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary work is increasingly needed to understand the complexity of contemporary communication. We think professional communication is an important aspect of many fields of human activity and in this area of study it is essential to be able to collaborate with all those who share an interest. CLAVIER is open to collaboration and looks forward to new challenges and new studies.

Modena, September 2016

Marina Bondi

Director of the CLAVIER Centre

Reference

Fuoli, Matteo, and Carita Paradis. 2014. A model of trust-repair discourse. *Journal of Pragmatics*. 74:52-69



CLAVIER WORKSHOP 2015

The discursive construal of trust in the dynamics of knowledge diffusion

discussant: Giuseppina Cortese

Rome, 10th June, 2015 – h. 12.00-18.00



Foto: G. Scattolon / Contrasto

FINANZIAMENTO DI MINISTRI E MINISTRI
DELL'ECONOMIA E, TURISMO E LA FINANZA
ROMAOTOP



SAPIENZA
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PROGRAM

12.00 – 12.20 Welcome address and opening remarks: Alessandra DeRose, Head of Memotef Department; Giuseppina Cortese, Marina Bondi and Rita Salvi

12.20 – 13.30

Chair: Girolamo Tessuto

Giuliana Garzone Exploring specialised discourse across media and modes: work in progress
Isola Cateraccio Epistemic and emotive adverbs in CSR reports: a preliminary investigation
Isabella Crawford and Daniele Franceschi The Pisa Audio-Visual Corpus Project: first forays

13.30 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 15.45

Chair: Chiara Prosperi Porta

Iranca Poppi Conveying national culture in our globalised era
Giuliana Diani Travel blogs on Italy: Perceiving tourist destination image through American eyes
Isabella Malavasi Multimodal strategies of knowledge communication and identity construction in
CSR Reports and Webpages: A comparative analysis

15.45 – 16.15 Coffee break

16.15 – 17.10

Chair: Sara Gesuato

Iaria Moschini From 'webridization' to 'geekization': Future developments in the study of social-media
discursive construal of trust
Janet Bowker Presentation of the volume *'The Dissemination of Contemporary Knowledge in English'*
Rita Salvi and Janet Bowker (eds), Bern, Peter Lang

17.15 – 18.00 Conclusions

Chair: Marina Bondi Discussant: Giuseppina Cortese

Scientific Committee

Marina Bondi
Nicholas Brownless
Isabella Crawford
Marina Cassella
Giuliana Garzone
Giuseppe Palumbo
Rita Salvi
Biana Tognini Bonelli

Organizing Committee

Janet Bowker
Isabella Inceil
Chiara Prosperi-Porta
Judith Turnbull

Workshop Venue

Aula Fanfani – V piano, Facoltà di Economia, Via Castro Laurenziano 9, Roma

INTRODUCTION

RITA SALVI AND JUDITH TURNBULL

I love the freedom of creativity when our ideas come together to create new ones and then spread. [...] The knowledge of one becomes the knowledge of millions. But also it is important to listen to understand each other, when we do both we feel part of something much larger than ourselves, and that is cool. My name is Tim Berners-Lee – I invented the World Wide Web.
(TV advert for an Italian telecommunications company)

Theoretical framework

This volume stems from a workshop held at the Sapienza University of Rome on June 10, 2015 and organised by the CLAVIER centre (Corpus Linguistics and Language Variation in English Research, Director Prof. Marina Bondi). Over the last few years CLAVIER has been working on a research project called *Language in Knowledge Dissemination* (LINKD) which has been investigating the theoretical, descriptive and applied perspectives of Knowledge Dissemination. In 2015 the Rome unit of the research centre published the volume “The Dissemination of Contemporary Knowledge in English”, edited by Rita Salvi and Janet Bowker, which collected a series of studies on the nature of knowledge dissemination, its principles, conceptualizations and constructs. It explored the use of language in the complex processes involved in the transformation of information into knowledge in a variety of fields and for a variety of audiences. The starting point of the investigation was the linguistic devices which allow information to reach the cognitive level of knowledge, with its forms of creation, use and exchange. This process is very much based on the paradigms of continuity and advancement, connecting past and present. Therefore, the linguistic analysis took into consideration intertextual relationships as well as the channels of interdiscursivity, as delineated by Fairclough:

The concept of interdiscursivity is modelled upon and closely related to intertextuality, and like intertextuality it highlights a historical view of texts as transforming the past – existing conventions, or prior texts – into

the present. The analysis of the discursive event as social practice may refer to different levels of social organization – the context of situation, the institutional context, and the wider societal context or ‘context of culture’ [...]. (Fairclough 1995: 134)

The present volume takes the research one step further by introducing the crucial, but intangible factor in everyday interrelations between human beings, namely trust, which is the second point at issue in the studies collected here. According to the Oxford Dictionary’s definition, trust is the firm belief in the reliability, truth or ability of someone or something. Assuming that the achievement of credibility and legitimacy is fundamental to successful communication in a globalized and virtual world, the essential complementary aspect to knowledge dissemination is the analysis of the language that builds trust in interpersonal interactions, in different contexts and settings. As Candlin and Crichton stated in the Introduction of their book *Discourses of Trust* (2013):

Issues surrounding trust are fundamental to people’s lives in contemporary societies, a fact not merely and sharply highlighted by the recent history of inter-relational practices associated with financial markets, international security, marketing and public relations, but even more persuasively and ever-presently in the formation and maintenance of relations among partners in the delivery, for example, of health and welfare services and in the public and private arenas of political and religious institutions. (Candlin and Crichton 2013, 1)

Trust is a buzzword, which is also problematic, as it includes the potentially disadvantageous concepts of ‘risk’ and ‘vulnerability’ with implications for control and power. In the chapters the twofold nature of trust is linguistically described and the two-sided relationship between trustors and trustees is highlighted in their linguistic interactions.

To bridge the gap between knowledge and trust, here we use the term ‘knowledge’ in the simple sense of “the state of knowing about or being familiar with something” (Cambridge English Dictionary). Knowledge is a fundamental aspect of empowerment; it will allow people to make informed decisions in every aspect of their lives and in every role they play, as workers, citizens, voters, patients, tourists, managers and investors. Easy and ready access to an ever increasing amount of information and knowledge have also heightened our awareness of society and the world, giving us greater understanding of the scope and intricacies of modern day life. On the reverse side, however, it also gives us insight into the not-so-transparent and not-so-clean borders of activities and transactions, kindling wariness, scepticism, even mistrust at times.

In particular, in specialized and scientific domains, which are the focus of our attention, the connection between knowledge dissemination and trust building is essential and critical at the same time. Different contexts and genres can produce similar or opposite results in language behaviour and style, showing a variety of networks of practices.

The enormous influence of the media nowadays, which favours the spreading of mechanisms such as “suggestion”, “persuasion” and “manipulation” derived from both cultural background and ideology, is the third field of investigation in the present book. The dialectical exchange established between sender and receiver on the net has altered the use of language, developing forms of re-writing and re-contextualization which deserve critical attention from linguists, but also from scholars of social sciences, professionals and educational institutions.

Content of the book

The “language of trust” is the backbone of the four sections of the book. Through the chapters, the various principles, conceptualizations, constructs and pragmatic dynamics of knowledge dissemination are shown in a range of discourse genres. The studies, which have been double peer reviewed, reveal the multi-levels of knowledge, its varied typology and its ongoing co-construction, maintenance and updating among heterogeneous audiences, which may vary from expert to lay. Alongside this, the issue of trust has been reported constantly to be significant in the nurturing of collaborative processes which we believe are essential in any human relationship.

Part I: Building trust

In the first section, the papers deal with the building of trust through different strategies in political, academic, tourist and educational contexts. The description of similarities and differences of language in four specific domains is an opportunity to compare strategies and forms of communicative behaviour.

In the first chapter, *The discursive construction of trust in European political communication*, **Rita Salvi** analyses the linguistic and rhetorical features of political discourse in a corpus of texts dealing with the problem of migration taken from Angela Merkel’s official website. These texts represent a mixed genre, as they include narration of events and quotations from the Chancellor’s speeches. The language perfectly reflects the meaningful interaction in an asymmetrical situation such as the relationship

between politicians (those who are trusted) and citizens (those who trust). Confidence and persuasion are realized by either the emphasis on apolitical qualities and personal demeanour or by the adoption of vague language to minimize cognitive dissonance in citizens.

A new genre in the academic domain is described by **Sara Gesuato** in *The PhD thesis report: Building trust in an emerging genre*. PhD thesis reports represent the fundamental document in which scholars evaluate and comment on post-graduate students' written work. The scholars explicitly manifest their presence in their reports, establishing their authority through suggestions and recommendations. But credibility is hard to achieve, especially when multiple tasks are involved: the report writer has to be honest and reliable as an assessor, helpful and supportive as a distant co-supervisor and mentor, fair and balanced as an examiner. The relevant discursive features and strategies analysed show how the report writers build a relationship of trust with their readership.

Giuliana Diani presents a case study of web-mediated communication investigating a corpus of travel blogs on Italian destinations written by American travelers, *The appeal of travel blogs: The image of Italy through American eyes*. Adopting corpus-assisted methods, the study aims at exploring which aspects of the travel experience bloggers describe and in what terms, what cultural meanings are constructed for the image of Italy and how such meanings are represented and consequently transmitted. The data shows how evaluative expressions are repeatedly exploited by 'tourist-writers' not only to highlight what is memorable about a journey, but also to signal what is advisable, whilst their narrations appear to establish and demonstrate their credibility for future travellers who will use information from what they consider credible blog posts.

In his contribution *Repositioning Museums on Children's Agenda*, **Federico Sabatini** states that trust and self-confidence is what children gain from the experience of the museum, if successfully processed in its socio-cognitive and interactive components. The logogenic capacity of Museum Discourse is no longer predominantly exercised as expert discourse, but increasingly configured as educational discourse leading to the construction of knowledge through "hands-on" experience. Equally relevant, the semiosis, or meaning-making capacity, inherent in the new "museum script" is guided by an ethical imperative to serve society equitably. The chapter examines electronic materials from different sources and with different addressee(s), from blogs to scholarly reflection and museum project presentations.

Part II: A Corporate Culture of Trust

Corporate culture is expressed in a variety of texts, genres and channels; yet, as “Corporate Social Responsibility” is an inherent value in this domain, CSR reports can be considered a fundamental means of communication and reference. It is generally agreed that the concept of CSR reporting is flexible, as each company can choose how to communicate its CSR progress, in whatever way it finds suitable. This lack of uniformity and the high level of flexibility are well shown in the first three chapters in this section.

In *Markers of trust: Epistemic adverbs of certainty and restrictive adverbs in CSR reports* **Paola Catenaccio** shows how some markers of discourse, namely epistemic adverbs of certainty and restrictive adverbs, contribute to both the delivery of information and the assertion of credibility. The underlying assumption is that through the investigation of interpersonal resources such as epistemic and restrictive adverbs it is possible to retrieve crucial information about the ideological underpinnings of CSR discourse, thus leading to a better understanding of this recently emerged discursive formation. Understanding the mechanisms of this communication will also give insights into how trust is built and maintained in business, at a time when large corporations are often subject to scrutiny and criticism, and intangible factors such as reputation become more and more important in determining business outcomes.

Considering the difficult position of companies in a globalized market, torn between the need to address a variety of multicultural audiences and the wish to emphasize some traits of their national culture and identity to distinguish themselves from their competitors, **Franca Poppi** focuses on the English version of CSR reports published on the websites of two airlines with very different cultural backgrounds: Delta (USA) and JAL (Japan). This multi-cultural context requires new strategies for building and maintaining trust. The analysis carried out in *Conveying trust in a globalized era* aims at finding out whether or not, in our present globalized era, the two selected airlines still refer to the typical values of their respective countries to influence their stakeholders’ attitudes and build trust.

Within the highly competitive scenario of the global economy, **Donatella Malavasi** investigates how the construction of identity and trust in some verbal resources is deployed by a sample of European leading companies in two different types of disclosures, CSR reports and websites. In particular, the author assumes that CSR reports are more technical and specialized documents, while webpages are rather ‘popularised’ disclosures targeted at a wider audience. Her analysis in *Building trust through*

corporate identity: An analysis of CRS reports and webpages sets out to examine the variation in enterprises' self-promotion as 'impeccable' and reliable corporate citizens in relation to the process of popularisation.

The fourth and last chapter in this section looks at corporate discourse from a different perspective, namely within the business organization. In *Organizational trust creation in peer coaching events: Multimodal means and representations*, **Janet Bowker** investigates the processes of trustwork in organizational discourse through a multimodal approach. She analyses the data derived from the in-house peer coaching and employee development events within a large multinational consulting group based in North America. The data consists of a selection from ten hours of audioconferenced internal employee coaching, and the pragma-linguistic analysis is carried out primarily on the multimodal visual data which accompanied the trainers' oral presentations, thus comparing the oral and written (PowerPoint) communication.

Part III: Maintaining and repairing trust

The third section is concerned with the maintenance and repairing of trust when it needs to be reinforced or comes under threat. As the chapters deal with sensitive topics such as politics, finance, tourism and business respectively, it comes as no surprise that apologies like "I'm sorry" or "I didn't mean to hurt you" are no longer sufficient. Some physical emotional reactions (even tears) are becoming more frequent in public and so perhaps considered acceptable to repair trust. But new layers of trust still have to be argued and negotiated through language.

In the first chapter, *A digital 'meeting place'? A socio-semiotic and multimodal analysis of the WhiteHouse.gov social hub*, **Ilaria Moschini** deals with the 'webridization' of US institutional language. The study is a micro-level analysis of the "social hub" page of the White House's website which shows how trust and participation are discursively constructed at both a linguistic/semiotic and digital level. The case study has been selected after mapping the evolution of the White House's website since 2008 and it seems to be emblematic in highlighting President Obama's institutional rhetoric on the relationship between socio-political participation and digital networks. In particular, the object of the analysis is the framework of the "social hub" page (that is the infrastructure which sets the interpretative frame) and not the various contents which are changed and updated on a regular basis.

Moving across to the other side of the Atlantic, *Knowledge transfer, ideologies and trust in public financial reporting* by **Chiara Proserpi**

Porta examines European institutional documents, namely the central banks' Annual Reports, comparing the findings obtained from the websites of the Bank of England, the Bank of Greece and the European Central Bank. Through the analysis of specific lexicon and phraseology, she describes the relationship between discursive practices, ideology and trust in this specialized but not homogeneous genre. The thread joining institution-centred knowledge transfer and people's trust in the European context affects both the process by which discourse comes to be formed and the way in which some institutions, such as central banks, promote an accountable identity, so as to deliver a credible performance in the community of practice.

Past in present: Disseminating credible heritage knowledge online, **Christina Samson's** contribution, covers the field of maintaining and disseminating trust in a cultural environment such as the guidebooks of Florence. Given the particular nature of cultural heritage, the author states that it cannot be thought of as a commodity in the conventional sense, as it has to be credible when presenting visitors with something they will consider 'authentic'. Thus, when heritage is represented and promoted in online guidebooks, they not only provide cultural and historical representations of a destination, but they also disseminate knowledge to build trust. The results do indeed show that online guidebooks disseminate credible knowledge based on accurate information which, in turn, reinforces and bolsters a trustworthy relation with their recipients.

In the last chapter of this section, *Repairing trust: A case study of the Volkswagen gas emissions scandal*, **Judith Turnbull** describes the language strategies adopted by the company in order to establish a new trustworthy relationship with consumers after the scandal. The analysis highlights Volkswagen's initial reaction to the scandal, before trying to draw people onto its side by giving some information about what was happening. The company finally publishes a detailed explanation three months after the scandal broke. The three phases produce different results in terms of language and communication techniques. The analysis has underlined that the main strategy adopted by VW is emphasising the positive, especially the technical ability of the company.

Part IV: Trust in medical communication

The fourth section presents the building/repairing trust processes in a very delicate area, the medical sector, in which specialists (researchers, doctors, journalists and even lawyers) have to establish a trustworthy relationship with the audience, very often patients.

Assuming that the communication of scientific findings is neither impartial nor neutral, **Renzo Mocini**, in *The construal of trust through relevance: Patterns of evaluative language in medical writing*, explores the interpersonal dimension of medical writing by highlighting how writers exploit linguistic resources and discourse devices to take a stance and express judgements. Based on a corpus of medical-journal articles, the study examines how they position themselves within their scientific community as scholars capable of evaluating data as ‘relevant’ while asserting their trustworthiness and credibility. The first part of the analysis deals with patterns of evaluation directly inscribed in discourse by means of the explicitly evaluative word *significant*, while the second investigates more covert ways of conveying relevance, that is, by means of focusing adjuncts.

In *Medical knowledge dissemination and doctor-patient trust: A multi-modal analysis*, **Daniele Franceschi** introduces spoken medical English examining doctor-patient conflict in an English L1 context and how it may be resolved through the adoption of certain strategies by the doctor himself/herself. Some strategies facilitate the comprehension of medical information, whilst others manage to create empathy and rapport between the parties. The three doctor-patient dialogues examined were chosen from a pre-collected database available on-line. The approach followed is multi-semiotic, since not only language but also facial expressions, hand gestures and body movements are observed and considered as contributing to meaning and trust construal.

The recontextualization of information, from scientific medical journals to press releases and online newspaper articles, is the topic discussed by **Ersilia Incelli** in *Spin in health news: Levels of trust in knowledge diffusion*. This process involves the notions of newsworthiness and proximity, which tell us about how writers see their readers and how lexical choices are orchestrated to manipulate the information they want to give. The chapter describes the distinct rhetorical phenomenon referred to as ‘spin’, that is a distortion of discourse which leads to the misrepresentation of medical results. While the aim is to build readers’ trust, journalists may paradoxically employ, whether consciously or unconsciously, somewhat deceptive rhetorical strategies, which actually go against trust.

In *Informational, promotional and trust building strategies in the web genre of clinical negligence case studies*, **Girolamo Tessuto** exploits online case studies that connect medical issues with legal matters. Websites provide a range of information, knowledge and data regarding individuals who have become the victims of some form of negligence at

the hands of medical or other healthcare professionals alongside the legal procedure for making a claim. Clinical negligence case studies emerge as a new genre within law firm websites, where they create an avenue for information sharing and promotion/marketing organised around trust building strategies. Combining genre analysis with the study of language in specialized domains, the research situates trust building in the dynamic processes of hybridization and interdiscursivity, touching upon and tying in most of the aspects discussed in the previous chapters.

Final remarks

In conclusion, when describing a variety of possible language features and rhetorical strategies adopted to build, maintain and repair trust, the chapters reflect different contexts of communication, interdisciplinary approaches, interest in promoting knowledge and achieving mutual understanding. Both the theoretical issues and their applications developed in each chapter are characterized by integrated methodological supports. Especially in professional domains, it is widely acknowledged that “trust building is problematic and that management of trust implies both the ability to cope in situations where trust is lacking and the ability to build trust in situations where this is possible” (Vagen and Huxham 2003, 5). We do hope that English (with its role of *lingua franca*) will help to facilitate trustworthiness by transmitting knowledge, understanding and ethical values, so that *we feel part of something much larger than ourselves*.

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