

Topic: Anthropomorphic Metaphors in Specialised IT Discourse

Sources for the planned PhD project: I use an IT LSP corpus and a GeWiss-based corpus of spoken academic discourse (two genres: student presentations and oral exams). Both corpora are ≈ 400.000 T each. The IT LSP corpus consists of forum & blog entries about Apple and Microsoft hard- and software. For both corpora, the process of data collection has been completed and they are being analysed.

GeWiss Project



German acronym, which stands for *gesprochene Wissenschaftssprache* = spoken academic discourse. Extract from the project description from the website

(<http://www1.aston.ac.uk/lss/research/research-projects/gewiss-spoken-academic-discourse/>): The project “aims to provide an empirical basis for the comparative study of spoken academic discourse in German, English and Polish. To this end, we are creating corpora of two main genres: presentations (including discussions) and oral examinations.” The purpose is to analyse “key practices involved in oral academic communication, using quantitative and qualitative methods.” (ibid.). Furthermore the project brief is “based on the assumption that different linguistic practices have developed in spoken academic discourse in German, English and Polish.” (ibid.).

Glossary of essential technical terms

cognitive semantics: is a theory of meaning that focuses on cognition, people’s mind. It is not limited to logics or how certain meanings relate to each other; it deals with cognition and human categorization. Main question of this approach: How do we structure and process the vast amount of information we deal with every day in our cognitive system? (see Löbner (2003: 254)). Main seminal work: Lakoff and Johnson (1980).

corpus: (i) (loosely) any body of text; (ii) (most commonly) a body of machine- readable text; (iii) (more strictly) a finite collection of machine-readable text, sampled to be maximally representative of a language or variety (McEnery & Wilson 2008).

discourse: In general, *discourse* means “actual instances of communicative action in the medium of language”, as Johnstone (2001: 2) puts it. She defines discourse as a mass noun, just like music or information, which have no plural. She also discusses the question why discourse analysis is not called language analysis. She states that the object of discourse analysis is more than spoken and written utterances, e.g. photography, clothing, architecture, video, dance etc. Discourse analysts often need to think about the connections between the language “and other such modes of semiosis, or meaning-making” (cf. ibid. p. 3).

epistemology: the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope (from: The Concise Oxford English Dictionary. Eleventh edition (revised)).

language for special purposes (LSP): The purpose of specialised texts (genera) is according to Kalverkämper and Baumann (1996: 20) that they are conventionalized communicational means that help to communicate the issue in a relatively fixed form while managing the reader’s expectations and enabling them to categorize the communicated information fairly quickly. So a specialised text demands a higher competence with respect to knowing the genre and conventions from both the reader and author. On the one hand, it is undisputable that this helps with orientation in communication in a specialized context.

IT / computer: Etymology: < Latin *computare* -- Skeat (2007): *computare* can mean ‘to think together’ or ‘to clarify something’ or ‘to reckon’. A computer is “more than just [...] a tool created by scientists to crunch numbers” and one with “unlimited potential”. Originally, “computers were people who did the computational work of scientists” (Campbell-Kelly 1997). IT / computer includes all existing or potential categories of computers: Personal computers (PCs), laptops, Mobile phones / “smart phones”, and new categories of devices: e.g. Apple iPad 2. IT also means information technology (Dutta / Mia 2009).

IT LSP / IT language: It consists of specialized terms that were borrowed from general English. Gotti (pp. 268f) mentions *hardware, chat group, program and disk*. Gotti says that the development of the technological know-how was directly related to the creation of its language. It is widely used “in manuals and literature illustrating hardware and software made in the U. S. A. and exported all over the world.” (ibid.).

metaphor: Etymology: Greek for “transfer to non-literal meaning” or “to carry something away” (Kluge 2002); “decorative view of metaphor” (Cameron 2003), examples: *The soldier is a lion. / She is a cow*. According to Aristotle, metaphors are mostly peripheral phenomena in language more than thought, and limited to certain genres. Different view on metaphor: see ↑cognitive semantics.

spoken academic discourse: It goes far beyond the words used by professors in lectures (Lee 2001). Broader definition: the “language which is used by the discourse community of scholars and students in academic settings for mainly academic purposes.” (Lee 2001: 51). Genres include: specialist and student presentations, students and lecturers speaking in lectures, consultation hours and oral exams. Discourse is the preferred term instead of language (Ehlich 1997); discourse: less ambiguity than language because it is not confused with individual languages e.g. German and English. Discourse also implies there is interaction, which is crucial for academic discourse because an academic text never stands alone. For previous research into Spoken Academic Discourse, English, see: Krishnamurthy & Jaworska (2008).

T = token, pl.: tokens: “the number of items (or tokens) within the text” (McEnery & Wilson 2008); for the computer, ‘words’ are sequences of character that are separated by space characters. This is how a computer counts words.

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