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David Banks, *The Birth of the Academic Article: Le Journal des Sçavans and the Philosophical Transactions, 1665-1700*

Sheffield: Equinox, 2017

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Banks, David. 2017. *The Birth of the Academic Article: Le Journal des Sçavans and the Philosophical Transactions, 1665-1700*. Sheffield: Equinox. 208 p. ISBN 978-1-78179-232-2.

- 1 We have every reason to welcome the publication of this book on the birth of the academic article, first because it deals with the history of the first scientific articles, which are at the heart of many research studies in ESP, and second, because it was written by David Banks, who has been promoting what he calls “diachronic ESP” for some years now (for example 2010, 2012 and 2016).
- 2 In this book, the author presents a linguistic analysis of the scientific articles printed in two academic journals (*Le Journal des Sçavans* and *the Philosophical Transactions*), which were published for the first time within two months of each other, in 1665, and in two different countries. The analysis covers the years 1665 to 1700, therefore focusing on a short diachronic period. The idea for this book, according to the author, came from previous research (Banks 2008) on the question of how scientific language “comes to be the way it is.” The framework for the analysis is Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (1978, 2014), a theory based on the importance of context in the production and interpretation of communication, since language is produced in and through society.
- 3 The short introduction is followed by seven chapters and a conclusion: Chapters 2 to 4 set the scene of the study and give detailed information on the linguistic, historical and methodological background of the research. Chapters 5 to 8 focus on four key features of Systemic Functional Linguistics, namely thematic structure, transitivity, modality and nominalization, which are applied to the diachronic analysis of the academic articles.
- 4 In the second chapter (the introduction, though very short, stands as chapter one), the author focuses on the linguistic background of the study and starts by explaining his choice of corpus dates: the corpus starts in 1665, when the very first issues of the periodicals were published, and ends in 1700, thirty-five years later. The 17th century seems a very relevant time frame, since, as the author explains, it is considered as a turning point in the history of scientific writing. It was at this particular time that academic writing, which had been solely produced in Latin until then, began to be written in vernacular European languages. This extremely useful and informative chapter also provides a very welcome brief account of what Halliday’s basic analysis framework consists of, which enables the reader to follow the analytical sections of the book, i.e. chapters 5 to 8, easily. The author focuses on three key features of the systemic functional theory: the thematic structure (that is the part of meaning relating to the way the message is structured), process types (processes are the actions, events and states which take place in the external world and which are most usually encoded

in the verbal form), and the grammatical metaphors and more specifically nominalized processes, i.e. processes which are congruently encoded into nouns or adjectives.

- 5 Chapter 3 provides a detailed historical background of the 17th century in France and in England. It shows how very different national histories produced very different political, academic and social contexts, which in turn deeply influenced the spirit of the two journals and the making of scientific writing in each country. Though this chapter may look slightly too detailed at first read, it actually contributes to explain some of the linguistic differences which were brought about to light through the comparative corpus analysis of the two journals. For instance, the analysis shows that observation, as a means of studying natural phenomena, is of much greater importance in the *Philosophical Transactions*, probably owing to the fact that science was practiced as an inductive, rather than deductive process in England.
- 6 Chapter 4 focuses on the corpus used, how it was compiled and manually analyzed, since only images of the texts are available. This shows very well that diachronic computerized corpus analysis is not always possible. The chapter also provides information on which text genres and subject matters are included in the corpus.
- 7 The following chapters present the detailed results of the corpus analysis and are all organized according to the same pattern: the chapter opens with a short presentation of the feature under scrutiny and then goes on to give detailed results for each journal, before offering some comparative elements.
- 8 Chapter 5 deals with the different thematic structures found in both journals. The chapter opens with a brief overview of what a thematic structure is (namely the way in which a speaker or writer organizes his discourse, distinguishing at the level of the clause, a rheme and a theme, which highlights the speaker's centre of interest). The author then explores the thematic structures of each journal in detail and shows that the differences in the grammatical functions of themes between the two journals diminished as time goes on: if the *Philosophical Transactions* thematized subjects less frequently and adjuncts more frequently than the *Journal des Sçavans* in 1665, this was no longer the case in 1694. It also shows that while the percentage of textual themes in the *Journal des Sçavans* decreased over time, it increased in the *Philosophical Transactions*. The comparison between the two journals shows that the thematic structure of the *Journal des Sçavans* was primarily on people, while the *Philosophical Transactions* focus more on things and only secondarily on people.
- 9 In Chapter 6, the author compares the results obtained for transitivity, using a system of five processes (material processes, mental processes, relational processes, verbal and existential processes, already described in Banks [2005]) which are briefly explained at the beginning of the chapter. The author then gives the detailed results of the study for both journals and shows for instance that the use of material processes had a tendency to rise over time in both journals, whereas the use of mental and relational processes remained fairly stable in the corpus.
- 10 Chapter 7 presents the different results for modality and again, by way of comparison, shows two major differences between the journals: the incidence of root modality is much greater in the *Philosophical Transactions* and reflects a greater interest in questions of a physical nature, whereas the *Journal des Sçavans* appears to focus more on moral questions.

- 11 The last chapter concentrates on nominalization, and especially grammatical metaphors which are a little more frequent in the *Journal des Sçavans* than in the *Philosophical Transactions*, probably owing to the great importance that the Royal Society placed on clear, simple language, thus leading the authors of the *Philosophical Transactions* to use a limited number of nominalized forms.
- 12 This book by David Banks differs from other works published on academic articles (Bazerman 1988 or Gross 1996) in that it develops a linguistic analytical approach rather than treating the texts from a rhetorical and sociolinguistic viewpoint as had been done before. Moreover, it provides very useful information on the methodology used to compile and analyze such a diachronic corpus. All in all, the reviewer feels that this book should be read by linguists interested in the diachronic study of specialized languages, as well as by linguists who still need to be convinced that diachrony is indeed an essential tool to understand contemporary scientific English.

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