BOOK REVIEW

CONSIDERATIONS ON 'GOOD DATA IN BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL DISCOURSE RESEARCH AND TEACHING'

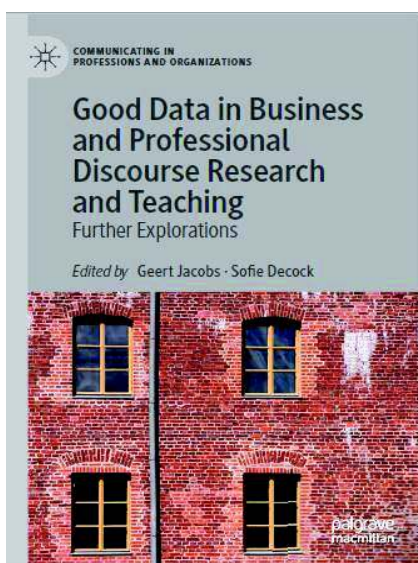**Ioana Claudia Horea[1], Cristian Dorin Horea[2]**
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Reviewed work:
Good Data in Business and Professional Discourse Research and Teaching. Further Explorations

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A very recent (January 2021) release of Palgrave Macmillan, published by Springer Nature Switzerland, the volume entitled *Good Data in Business and Professional Discourse Research and Teaching. Further Explorations* is a collection of explorative works on research and teaching Business and Professional Discourse, that comprises seven titles on the theme of professional discourse and communication in business, studies undertaken by ten researchers, scholars and academics from various countries: USA, Belgium, Netherlands, France, Japan, New Zeeland and Great Britain.

A clean and straightforward structure strikes from the first flicking through the volume and gives the feeling of a clear approach waiving any unnecessary sophistications. With no further sub-sectioning, categorisations or classifications - which some editors tend to resort to, in their attempts to make their materials look more complex or better organised - the simple, seven-title table of contents in this

volume renders a neat and tasteful construction, which is, in our view, a true mark of professionalism.

For descriptive reasons only, with no such indications in the volume, we can consider there is a prefatory section of 13 pages and then there follows the actual main section, consisting of the seven contributions logically arranged, beginning with the editors' introductory and title-explanatory article.

As for the above mentioned initial section, after the volume's first pages, that include details about the series, title page, publishing information and opinions about the book, the table of contents comes and it is followed by short presentations of the authors' expertise fields and backgrounds, in two pages of "Notes on contributors". In the last two pages (xi and xiii) of this first section, readers are provided with a List of Figures and a List of Tables, with names and pages where these elements are found along the volume. These lists can prove as really helpful tools in the online format, as the entries in the lists are actually direct links to the mentioned figures or tables, within the texts of the studies in the main section. And so are the entries in the table of contents and the reference notes within the texts, facilitating direct and targeted movement through the material.

With respect to the layout of the actual research content of the book, i.e. the 194 pages of the main section consisting of the seven research studies (between 23 and 32 pages), the latter follow a unitary structure and format, again very simple and light, containing: title; name of author(s); introduction; main body of research (data presentation, method exposition and result analysis); conclusion; notes (in some cases) and alphabetical list of references. The overall impression is an honouring one, namely that, within this volume, value lies, as it should, in the text itself, the solid and clear ideas expressed, rather than in any ornaments.

The final 3 pages of the volume consist of an Index of terms.

The editorial team, Sofie Decock and Geert Jacobs, author the inaugural study, coming under a very suggestive name: *What Counts as Good Data in Business and Professional Discourse Research and Training?*

At start of this first study, readers are explained that the volume will undertake to tackle an aspect belonging to the initial key stage of research processes, i.e. the data studied and how they should be analysed, focusing on four issues, namely: authenticity, triangulation, background and relevance.

The introductory study is presented by the two researchers as a meta-analyses of how the abovementioned issues are dealt with. "It is not aimed at exhaustive or systematic coverage of the four issues listed above (nor at a detailed rendering of what the chapters are about, for that matter) and it will, no surprise, reveal internal inconsistencies and conflicts between the chapters" (p.4) comes as a sort of disclaimer and is next followed by quite detailed presentations of the four notions, in 3-5 pages each, with considerations regarding their occurrence and discussions in the chapters to come.

For authenticity it will be shown that when considering workplace interactions, what people think they do is rather distinct from what they actually do (p.5), which will come up analysing actual records of their interactions in comparison with what is gathered during interviews. The former represent first hand data while the latter will be seen as second hand data, more controlled, less natural, somehow manufactured or compromised (p.7). Same is argued about business magazines: with their professional language and style, intended for professionals, meant to

promote, to render a positive picture of the domain, i.e. having 'agendas', they are felt as less trustable in terms of authenticity of the data presented.

Triangulation is explained as the application of more than one sampling method for data collection, extrapolating to more than one methodology of research, two investigation methods that lead to the same result, two theoretical approaches applied, driving to the same conclusion. It is basically seen as a mixed method in which one approach returns a certain result and the other path leads to the same result, so that this common result is taken as fact, as reality, since it has been proven by both lines of research.

The background brings about the environment in the workplace context, where distinction can be noted between, for instance, white collars and blue collars and also intercultural differences can be sensed. A question that arises at one point is how much data is in fact necessary (p.16), i.e. how deep these sampling particularities should go and how data saturation can be prevented.

As for the relevance, it is claimed that the scholarly effort is useful for practitioners (p.18). If workplace interactions data can be used to solve problems and develop good workplace relationships, the professional magazines help build the identity of a professional community through the circulation and evolution of the specific language.

The study authored by Janet Holmes and Bernadette Vine and entitled *Workplace Research and Applications in Real World Contexts: The Case of the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project* puts forward a mammoth project having been running for two decades and a half: LWP, on the language of the domain in New Zealand English, namely the 'workplace talk' (p.25). Several aspects are discussed, such as: researching authentic workplace communication, communication challenges with the immigrants, concern on successful communication, application for speaking of EFL, respectively of ESL (in the case of the immigrants). Authenticity, triangulation and background make the focus of LWP and the preferred data collection method is from authentic workplace interactions instead of interviews. The introductory part brings one more highlight, namely a debate about scientific rigour versus practical relevance (p.27).

The researchers first introduce us to how they gained access to workplaces for collecting data, most valued method being that of convincing people (700) in various companies (30) to participate in this project by direct recordings of their workplace interactions (2000). Next, readers are presented how methodology was adapted to the data collected and are afterwards directed through the theoretical framework. Then, in an analysis of workplace discourse, 6 examples are provided, and before the concluding paragraph, the authors show several applications of the research project, in workshops and teaching materials.

What Is Professional in a Professional Magazine? Using Corpus Analysis to Identify Specializedness in Professional Discourse and Culture is the third title in the volume, the longest study, with the most complex structure: three large sections coming between the introduction and the vast conclusion, namely Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Results, each further divided into 4-6 subsections.

The authors Fanny Domenec and Philippe Millot first introduce the reader to the purpose of their study, the analysis of the specialized nature of "professional

language and discourse, reflecting on the data and methods that can be used in the field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP)" (p.56) and announce the "professions chosen for this study — namely ethics and compliance officers and records and information managers" (p.56). At the end of the introductory section there is a briefing on how the study is organized.

After the overview on "Recent Evolutions in the Study of Professional" and the considerations on "Discourse: Accessing Reliable and Relevant Data", come the subsections of defining profession and professional magazines and of "showing why they can be seen as authentic data to study professional practices and 'specializedness'." (p.59) in "Characterizing the Evolution of Professional Specialization through Language: A Bottom-up Approach to Investigate Professions". Readers then find about data collection and methodology, being however warned, in "Building Parallel Corpora in Specialized Professional Discourse", that "magazines do not entirely represent business realities in these domains. Rather, magazines are a particular discourse type which undeniably conveys a promotional, positive "picture" of the specialized communities in question." (p.67) Next the authors present how "specializedness" was retrieved from the corpora, how they identified degrees of specialization through collocational profiles and the mediation features they found that specialized magazines use in order to convey professional information to non-expert readers. The two researchers explain that "the results present four main aspects of professional specialization in professional magazines: the distribution of general semantic categories; domain-specific terms for each professional magazine; domain-bound collocational patterns, and the strategies used for conveying specialized information" (p.59) It can be briefly concluded that, despite the drawback of their "agendas", professional magazines are, as the authors remark, "useful entry points to characterize emerging professional milieus. Not only do they help professionals in the field define the norms that regulate their field, but the data they contain can also be useful to students or other practitioners to get familiar with this field." (p.59)

Christina Efthymiadou writes on *Researching Trust in Business Partnerships: Reflections on Data Collection and Positionality*, focusing on linguistic authenticity in data collection and researcher's positioning. The study is based on the writer's PhD project, concerning "discursive construction and performance of trust between Greek and Turkish business partners involved in cross-border collaboration." (p.89). Several problematic aspects are brought up and argued along the study: from the fabricated nature of interviews seen as constructed events, to the perceptions of the researcher entailing consequences for the research; from the difficulty of gaining access to the field and to the data, to the language proficiency issues or gender considerations and labels attached to the researcher; from the different researcher roles impacting the fieldwork experience, to the "lens" through which each researcher filters and makes meaning of the data collected. The researcher still considers that ultimately "interview data can indeed be a legitimate and valuable source of information in ethnographic projects, despite the influence of the researcher's presence on the interaction" (p.89), showing that she made good use of these: "interviews, in which the researcher's presence clearly affected the interaction at hand, were treated as a legitimate source of data in my study." (p.110)

The fifth study, proposed by Hiromasa Tanaka and entitled *Measuring Competence for Global Business: In Search of Authentic Data in Japanese Business Corporations* justifies how cultural diversity is not always easy to adjust and combine, as aspects of the Japanese system influenced by historical, geographical and economic factors can be confusing for non-ethnics. The approach of this study is an interesting shift, as it "reports on the process of presenting critical incident vignettes without access to naturally occurring interaction data. The vignettes were devised employing data collected from multiple sources and their authenticity was continually revised through review and dialogue with stakeholders until their authenticity was verified. Thus, the main question in this paper is whether business discourse data can be simulated authentically." (p.118)

Discussing English communication competence in intercultural business contexts, the researcher puts on the table the concept of 'InterCultural Interaction Competence' (ICIC), referring to the competencies needed for appropriately communicating in an intercultural context. Next, the authors presents methods of data collecting in ICIC and tests for measuring ICIC to then pass to the context of the test development project at stake and afterwards to the main focuses of the article: data collection process and the authentication of the data. Thus, the main sections follow, describing the entire project, beginning with initial data collection and analysis, where three hypotheses come up, continuing with in-depths 90 minute semi-structured interviews of 31 employees in 21 companies and assessment of specific features of global business discourse competence as conveyed by the previous stage. The challenges of developing a situational judgement test and the subsequent employment of the alternative approach of the vignette method for reproducing the necessary authentic critical incidents are next presented, followed by explanations of how data analysis is used in the critical incident development process. In the last section an example of a critical incident is given and also clarifications about its implications, usage and usefulness. The researcher concludes: "While some might debate the efficacy of the critical incident creation approach proposed here in adequately representing authentic data, we believe it to be one of the best alternative methods of ethically presenting quasi-authentic data." (p.134)

Editor Geert Jacobs co-authors with Astrid Vandendaele another article, *Leveraging Student-Led Interviews in the Multilingual Workplace*, analyzing "multilingual communicative practices in the workplace" and trying also to assess "what counts as data", based on "65 semi-structured interviews conducted by graduate students of business communication in the organizations where they were about to start their traineeships." (p.144)

After identifying case and data, research questions and method are formulated. 'What can we learn from our data about multilingualism in the workplace?' and 'What can we learn about the process of data collection based on the interviews our students conducted at their internships?' (p.147) are the two questions to be addressed. The findings will prove multilingualism as an enriching opportunity, as seen in the 5 extracts exemplified, and also a gatekeeping criteria in selecting new employees, as proven by extract 6, but there are also policies regulating or restricting its use, a looser attitude towards it is discovered with consideration to internal communication inside the organization, in extract 7, while there might be

also linguistic choices determined by government, as noted in extract 8. Presenting the collective data gathering the authors explain the three perspective: interviewer as student (extract 9), as researcher (extract 10,11), and as practitioner (extract 12,13), and they will conclude that "Any data, including audio and video recordings, interview transcripts or the results of survey research, are deeply and unavoidably embedded in the organizational context where they originate, and they are bound to entail profound power asymmetries that impact on what people say or write." (p.162)

In the last article of the volume, *Coworking: A Rhetorical Enterprise Situated in Place*, Deborah C. Andrews puts up for discussion features of a new kind of workspaces brought about by the disruptions occurred in several sectors of economy: the "coworking enterprises, part office with advanced technology and part social setting", where "collaborative communicative practices" develop "across disciplines, cultures, and perspectives" and "the language [...] creates a spatial experience." (p.168) After presenting the limitations, the print presentation unable to render the highly audio-visual effects of the online and the pandemics of Covid 19 causing lock-down at the moment of the study (spring 2020), the focus turns to data and method with a view to authenticity, triangulation, saturation and background. The study has in view five coworking websites, 'The Hive', 'Impact Hub', 'Central Working', 'Spaces', and 'Spacecubed', and the main section of the article analyzes their rhetorical strategies: logos, ethos and pathos. Next, these three appeals - rational, ethical and respectively emotional - are analyzed combined in performance, "effectively integrated in a persuasive story, told through an empathetical rhetorical persona" (p.186). The author discusses here the case of 'Central Working' - perceived as facing the three big challenges of entrepreneurs: "space, support, and a magical experience of community", - considering and commenting on the two scripts on their website, " 'The story of why' and 'Our values,' and four quoted testimonials" (p.187). One of the conclusions mentioned here seems to now hold true at a scale larger than the sphere of the research at stake: "assumptions about community, the social creation of knowledge through face-to-face communication, the collaborative origins of innovation, and the importance of place—these seem, like the coworking spaces themselves, relics of a far distant past. It's hard to know what form knowledge work, now mostly digital, will take when the world reopens." (p.190)

The volume is indeed, as intended and advertised, a collection of diverse, direct and honest contributions to the theme announced, each of them having a unique relevance, for shedding light on the specificities of the region, the style and the system they belong to, and bringing about the distinct touches of the researchers authoring them. Heterogeneous enough and sufficiently comprehensive for one volume, the research could be continued with future collections of contributions from other geographical areas as well. Unitary in its diversity, this present work adds value to the research in the field and comes as useful for all stakeholders in business domains, in professional communication and in languages for specific purposes.