**Discourse traces: marks of subjectivity left by social actors in publications related to agricultural programs, in English and Spanish.**

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**Abstract**

This research is part of an interdisciplinary Project entitled “La expression escrita: análisis de journals y publicaciones de programas de desarrollo y su anclaje en los territorios”, related to the programs *Cambio Rural* and *Pro-Huerta* by INTA. In that work, three levels were analysed: the production units of such programs from three regional locations, the programs from the institutional standpoint and the socio-linguistic level of analysis. This research focalizes on the production of knowledge and on the presence of discourse traces left by social actors and those from different institutions and which evinces both the institution and the social actors’ subjectivity. We analysed 20 abstract published in national and international journals written in English and Spanish. Thus, the objective was to describe the main discourse traces left by the social actors in the abstracts which are part of the written production published, both in Spanish and English, of papers dealing with the programs.

**Key words**: territories –rural development—interdiscipline—academic-scientific writing

**Introduction**

The word territories refers to geography and more precisely to human geography. At the same time, the word development refers to geographical issues and to a way of inhabiting and identifying with the territories (Giarraca, N.: 2001; Claval, P.: 2002; Bengoa, J.: 2003; Bossier, S.: 2004; Berdegué, J. et. al.: 2004; Gorenstein, S. et. al.: 2009; Milo Vaccaro, M. et. al.: 2012; Manzanal, M.: 2014; Lattuada, M. et. al.: 2015; Gonzalez, M. V.: 2017; among diverse authors that retake the terms of rural development in the ´90s). Public policies are related to the conception of territories and rural development from the conceptions of policy instruments while the conception of State is perceived from the public-private spaces. Social relationships mark visible and invisible circuits among social actors who outline the territories in common geographical spaces which acquire meaning for the social actors involved. These social circuits are related to the production cycles, to different types of knowledge, to institutional and institutionalized guidelines as well as to explicit and implicit norms.

In the area of agronomy, we make specific reference to the context where the production processes are carried out using the most important natural resource which is the land. Although the land can be accessed from different production conditions, from the concept of rurality after the green revolution, it is still essential for production. The spatial dimension linked to the concept of territories is different from the urban one, since the urban consumption behaviour, for example, is typical of this dimension. The rural dimension can be divided into activities related to “production” and into activities “with other purposes”, for instance, those services related directly to agricultural activity. The expansion of capital in the area of agronomy, in times of globalization, modifies the spaces devoted to social relationships over time, as well as the dimension now given to productions.

Communication technologies modify these conceptions, and at the same time, the ideas are strengthened and consolidated from the so-called traditional productions concerning the typical rules of each territory related to social actors and to cycles of production. The actors differ in the story they narrate about the territory, in their insertion in them and in the policies that as public policies develop themselves in public spaces. In this sense, the programs that are delineated for the territory, from an administrative definition, are centred in the net of social-individual relationships, collective and institutional, since its creation as programs that later turned into policies or became policy instruments of agricultural and social assistance policies.

The production and publication of knowledge as well as the participation in the intellectual and cultural capital follow those guidelines in the territories that include specific social relationships which are intermittently visible. These visualizations show only a fragment of the knowledge produced in the territories. The institutions systematize part of that information in the publication of the programs. Journal publications are a specific territory of social relationships within an institution, and spring from concrete production processes developed by diverse authors analysing the processes. Even with topics in common, such publications do differ from those produced in the territories originated from social practices, imprinting their marks of subjectivity.

This research is part of an interdisciplinary project entitled “*La expression escrita: análisis de journals y publicaciones de programas de desarrollo y su anclaje en los territorios*”, related to the programs *Cambio Rural* and *Pro-Huerta* by INTA and that had three levels of analysis. On the first level of analysis, we studied the relationships among units of production, which has enabled an analysis of the territory enhanced daily from social relationships and from the units of production. Knowledge is consolidated in the territories and is linked to those topics. On the second level considered intermediate between the programs and social actors, there are governmental and non-governmental institutions which are sources of information that are later turned into publications. These institutions are town councils, producer associations, clubs, schools, etc. and they constitute forms of expression of what is considered public and communal. The institutional net is seen as the second level of analysis observed from the perspective of the programs *Cambio Rural* and *ProHuerta* according to how these programs consolidate themselves in the territories from this intermediate institutionalized level. On the third level, we focused on the reproduction of knowledge that is published in journals and that differs from the one produced in the territories where the programs are developed, since it is measured according to the objectives and the interpretations of the different realities which different authors express. This work begins with the analysis of 20 abstracts taken from published journals since it is the best level known for scientific knowledge production and dissemination. Thus, the objective of this work was to describe the main traces of subjectivity present in the abstracts published in journals which are seen as knowledge produced in the context of the programs.

**Analysis**

At present, we analysed 20 abstracts from scientific-academic articles validated and monitored nationally and internationally. These samples refer both to agronomy programs as well as to other areas related to agricultural, livestock and cattle production in general. Besides, if one searches for information in journals, under the names “Cambio Rural” or “Prohuerta”, one will realize that the terms have not been frequently used in the last two decades, especially under those names. However, some information may appear if one looks for the authors who may have analysed part of the produced knowledge by the actors at the level of production units and at the level of the institutions.

Knowledge produced at the level of production units as well as in the institutions is incorporated to the pre-existing one. It shares the same connotations it has in the territory of social relationships and in the territory of power, considering the neutrality or the objectivity that the word may have. Although knowledge is generated in the territories, there is a notorious difference between the formalization of knowledge that emerges from the territories and the one referred to by the producers which is culturally and historically located. There is a gap between the published knowledge originated in the institutions and the non-formal one: not mentioning explicitly who the recipients of the programs are and the reason for participating, or the connotations of the economic, cultural and social worth. These are weakly shown through the use of hedges in the publications.

According to Benveniste (1966), the theory of enunciation implies the appropriation of language by the subjects who produce it and who leave their personal traces (as modality) on discourse, and of the spatial-temporal territory of enunciation (as deictic references). This theory forms the basis to understand the subjective traces in discourse and is enlarged by the addition of new elements. Following this perspective, Maingueneau (2005) distinguishes three major dimensions in enunciation: 1) the traces that account for the presence of the subject of enunciation, 2) the traces that account for the relationship between the addresser and the addressee, 3) the traces that mark the attitude of the subject towards discourse.

Bahtin (1982) adds that the scientific-academic article can be considered as dialogical discursive arena where authors position themselves in relation to the scientific community to which they address and where they want to belong by presenting the results of a specific area of knowledge. This is a collaborative construction of new knowledge (Hyland: 2000) in which it is habitual to refer back to previous research by considering the facts presented by other scientists about a topic in order to compare and contrast them with their own. It is not about just cutting and pasting quotations: it is about making the authors engage in “dialogue”. Through this dialogue, authors leave an impression or *ethos* as subjects of enunciation (Maingueneau: 1999), according to the norms established for the scientific-academic discourse. This image differs from the knowledge of local realities and from the communal space. Now the subjects position themselves in a type of discourse considered “academic” which is part of a field of knowledge but which is not the only possible discourse.

In the area of academic-scientific research, journals are the internationally validated means used to produce and disseminate knowledge. For a long time, academic-scientific writing has been characterised by the properties of objectivity, neutrality, impersonality and precision with which it referred to external reality and that would appear in the text as independent from the author’s emotions, feelings and personal appraisals. According to Montolio (2001), it is basically informative, transparent, without marks of subjectivity, polyphony or argumentation: observation, analysis and results would be devoid of “the writer’s personal implication in the facts presented”.

Following García Negroni’s line of research and analysis (2008), we agree in that the evident marks of enunciation, frequent in academic-scientific articles from the fields of agronomy and natural sciences (in Benveniste’s sense, 1966) without traces of a speaker who takes responsibility of their use, coincide with the schema Introduction-Methodology-Results-Discussion-Conclusion. Moreover, syntax is characterized by the absence or low frequency of the 1st person singular pronoun that conceals the actual number of authors of the article in order to favour the impersonal and non-agentive forms, passive voice or nominalizations.

In the last decades, however, the objectivity and the impersonality of academic-scientific papers –even in the so-called “hard sciences”—have been strongly debated. Recent research has focused on the study of authorial identity (Gallardo: 2004; Harwood: 2005), on emphatic constructions, use of hedges or mood markers (Hyland: 2000), on the convention of how to quote and how to refer to another author’s knowledge (Hyland: 2000; Kayser: 2005), on impersonal and textual meta-discourse (Hyland: 1998; Dahl: 2004), on argumentative mechanisms (López Ferrero: 2003; García Negroni: 2005), and on the expression of academic conflict (Swales: 1990; García Negroni and Ramírez Gelbes: 2005) and have stated that the writers of academic-scientific discourse do leave marks of their presence and that discourse is neither neutral nor monologic.

In the corpus chosen for the present paper, we analysed hedging—one type of subjective mark commonly used in academic-scientific articles. Myers (1989), Swales (1990), Salager-Meyer (1994) and Hyland (1998) all define hedges as a group of stylistic, rhetorical, semantic and pragmatic mechanisms which are persuasive and conventional to each discourse community (Morales, Cassany and Gonzalez Peña: 2007). They are used in the scientific communication among specialists to fulfil some of the three purposes: a) to soften or reduce the force or the degree of certainty of a proposition, thus to express its temporary status and differentiate it from the facts shared within the community (Moreno: 1998); b) to reduce the degree of commitment of authors regarding their assertions, and avoid threats to the already established members of the community as well as potential rejections and criticisms (Brown and Levinson: 1987); and c) to show politeness, deference and respect to the colleagues (Moreno: 1998). Besides, Morales, Cassany and Gonzalez Peña (2007) explain that hedging is often multipurpose: one resource achieves several functions and one function can be achieved in different ways (Vass: 2004).

We chose the following categories to analyse data:

-**Impersonal structures**: impersonal, non-agentive verbs and non-agentive passive constructions (those that do not explicitly have a subject) and royal “we” (those constructions that refer to collectives, are vague or without specific human agents). For example: se entiende, se recomienda, se sabe que, los resultados sugieren, los estudios muestran; it is believed/ understood/ recommended, the results suggest, the studies show.

-**Shields**: epistemic modal verbs, epistemic verbs, evidential verbs, adverbs and adjectives of possibility and probability. For example: poder, podría, parecer, sugerir, possible, probable; can, could, may, might, seem, appear to be, probable, and others.

-**Compound hedges**: the combinations of two or more hedging strategies. For example: “los resultados podrían sugerir” presents an impersonal construction and an epistemic modal verb with an epistemic verb. In English, this would be “The results might/could suggest.”

Taking into account research done by various authors such as Hyland (1998) or Nuyts (2000), it can be asserted that such verbs as “suggest” or “show” are lexical resources often used to show the results of the research and can express inferences, judgement or point at knowledge. Epistemic and evidential verbs are transparent resources used to codify the subjectivity from the epistemic source and can be used to weigh the type of commitment or the degrees of certainty. It should be reminded that epistemic verbs express an estimation of the possibility of certain aspects of something to be true or false in the context of the possible world under scrutiny. Overall, they signal a type of epistemic judgement with a high or medium degree of certainty and its evidence is not always made explicit. A group of verbs often used are considerar, creer, pensar, sugerir (Ferrari: 2009); consider, believe, think, suggest. Evidential verbs signal the type of evidence and the evidential predicates present knowledge as the result of a perception or the empirical result: for example, demostrar, aparecer como, mostrar (Ferrari: 2009); show, demonstrate, prove.

In the abstracts under analysis, we concluded that there is not a pattern followed and that each researcher uses the most convenient type of hedge at the moment of writing their abstracts. Following this idea, the discourse chosen for our analysis does not show an organization different from the guidelines instructed for authors by the journals.

Some of the examples are as follows:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Impersonal constructions | 1. A […] methodology **was used for**…  2. …a typology **was constructed**…  3. a significant relation **was observed…**  4. …these surveys **were processed** by means of…  5. In this study **we** present a synthesis…  6. …**our** participation in different events…  7. **We** focused…  8. **We** studied the system…  9. The **results show**…  10. The present **article aims** at analyzing… | 1. …la metodología utilizada **combina**… (sin const. pasiva)  2. El universo de promotores **fue clasificado** contemplando…  3.**Se observó** una relación…  4…dichas encuestas **se procesaron** a través de…  5. En este trabajo **se presenta** una síntesis…  6.…**de nuestra** participación en distintos eventos…  7. **Nos** centramos…  8. **Se estudió** el sistema….  9. Los **resultados arrojan**…  10. El presente **trabajo se propone** analizar… |
| Shields | 1….and their **possible** boundaries…  2. …that **seems** to go against…  3. …forms of life **can be considered** sustainable…  4. …**could generate** conditions…  5. …factors that **enable** the creation of… | 1.…y sus **posibles** limitaciones…  2… que **parece** ir en contravía…  3. ...formas de vida **pueden considerarse** sustentables…  4. …**podrían redituar** […] condiciones…  5. …factores que posibilitan la creación… |
| Compound  hedges | 1**. This study aims** to understand…(present simp.)  2. **It is concluded** that institutional changes **are being operated** as a result […] which **is being constructed**…  3. **This cannot be entirely understood** without considering…  4. …such factors **could induce more or less** sustainable dynamics…  5. …**these services have not been able to reduce substantially** … | 1…las preguntas que **este estudio se formula** son…  2. **Se concluye** que los cambios institucionales que **se están operando** como resultado […]que **se está construyendo**…  3. **Esto no se puede comprender en su totalidad** sin tener presente….  4. …tales factores **pueden llevar a** dinámicas **más o menos** sostenibles…  5. …**dichos servicios no han logrado disminuir de manera sustancial**… |

It must be highlighted that the type of hedge used in abstracts depends on the section of the paper where it springs from. That is to say that impersonal constructions are often found at the beginning of the paper where the topic is introduced, while shields and approximates are seen in the body of the paper where materials and methods as well as results and discussion are developed. In the case of compound hedges, they come at the end of the abstracts and are related to the conclusion of the papers.

Hedging is the author’s constructive attempt to fulfil their purposes; and it also shows their understanding of the process necessary to be followed in order to publish an article. Even though the use of hedges is part of the writer’s scientific culture, it is apparent that their use in abstracts is restricted to the communicative function.

**Final considerations**

As it was already put forward, this work belongs to a larger one under process and has progressed in the selection of discourse traces that are stressed at the local level but with different connotations from those found in the publications such as in academic-scientific journals. Likewise, when reading the reformulation of the programs, they can sometimes be considered as instruments of the policies and some others as public policies. The group leaders from the locations under analysis have mentioned participation, familiarity with the programs and the institutional network, from the history of the territories in relation to the policies; however, the policies are not necessarily related to the programs, from the view of the social practices that mirror the daily circuits which are different among social actors.

In the context of this work, we have already observed that there are no significant differences between the Spanish and English versions in the strategies used for personalization/ depersonalization to evade the subject of the enunciation in the diverse disciplines. As regards the passive voice, there is only one possible form in English that includes a form of the verb “be” followed by the past participle form of the main verb while in Spanish there is the possibility of using a similar form or the one called “pasiva con se”. We also noticed that, in formal writing, inclusive ‘we’ comes with verbs that entail shared knowledge (understand, see, appreciate, among others); while “nosotros de modestia” or “exclusive we” in English comes with verbs of communication (say, state, write, among others). The very first appreciations drive us into some questioning as regards how discourse, though differs between the two languages, it presents the subject as it is required by the norms for publication, and what is used as hedged expressions become part of the authorial personalization.

Knowledge is produced within the social practice with the actors giving them meaning. From our analysis, we consider that this knowledge is lost along the diverse institutional and systematised instances in the journals. In this path, the territories of the units of production, of the institutions, of the journals and of the norms show us a complexity in terms of how they have an incidence on each other, even if they are contextualized in relation to the concepts of rural development and public policy at the different stages.

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