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Volume 16

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Edited by Guido Erreygers and Geert Jacobs

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Preface

In May 2002 an international conference on 'Text and Economics' was held at the University of Antwerp (Belgium). It was organized by members of the Faculty of Applied Economics as part of the celebration of the foundation, 150 years before, of the business school which evolved into UFSIA, one of the constituent parts of what is now the University of Antwerp. One of the major themes of the conference was the interface between linguistics and economics, broadly speaking. The present volume contains a selection of the papers that were read on this topic. All of the articles are substantially revised versions of the research that was originally presented at the conference.

We would like to thank the former UFSIA for their generous support of the different activities that made this initiative possible. In addition, we are grateful to the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (FWO), which provided a grant for the organisation of the conference.

Thanks are also due to Ingeborg Dusar, who came up with the idea to organize a conference on text and economics, including literature, and who played a major role in organizing the event. Finally, we would like to thank Klaartje Verbelen, who was originally hired to do the administrative work, but who turned out to be the heart and soul of the conference.

Guido Erreygers and Geert Jacobs

Introduction

Guido Erreygers and Geert Jacobs

This volume brings together a number of wide-ranging, interdisciplinary research articles on the interface between discourse studies and economics. Our objective is a double one: on the one hand, we hope to explore in what way insights from economics can contribute to the analysis of discursive practices in various institutional settings; on the other hand, we want to find out what role discourse studies can play in economic research. That is why a number of the articles in this volume were written by linguists and communication scholars while some others were written by economists and other social scientists. What they all have in common is that they present a language approach to economics and the economy.

Aim

It would be exaggerated to say that a single thesis emerges from the book. Nevertheless, all contributions reveal the widespread influence of a broad variety of economic reasoning in many different spheres of life. This undoubtedly reflects the increasing importance of economic ways of thinking in society. It seems as if economics is everywhere. No wonder then that discourse analysts have picked up these signals and are paying more and more attention to economic arguments, metaphors, models and theories.

Of course, integrating an economic perspective into the analysis of texts is not new. Of the wide range of work on the interface between language and economics, Critical Discourse Analysis represents one of the most popular traditions. Think of the analysis of marketization that has been popularized by Norman Fairclough and a steadily increasing number of others (Fairclough 1996). Drawing on the insights of Bourdieu and Foucault, they have made it very clear that economic concepts can help understand what people say and write in a variety of social contexts.

Likewise, since the mid-eighties, more and more economists have been scrutinizing the impact of discursive practices in economics. The pioneering work of Deirdre McCloskey (1985, 1990) on the rhetoric of economics, of Philip Mirowski (1989) on the role of physical and mathematical metaphors in economics, and of Arjo Klamer (1983) on economic storytelling have been very influential among students of the history and methodology of economics. They have shown that there is a highly discursive as well as persuasive dimension to economic theorising. Recently, Ariel Rubinstein (2000) has applied game theoretic concepts to the analysis of language. Of course, the linguistic study of economics is a lot older than that. As far back as the scholastics, textual analysis was used as a basis for economic enquiry in the form of classical dialectics (Fairclough & Graham 2002). More recently, Marx's comments on language and the media-based approach of Harold Innis should be mentioned in this respect.

Clearly, linguists and economists have shown interest in each other's fields for some time now, even if they have not really talked to each other. What is new about the present collection is that it brings together research articles from the two disciplines in what should be seen as a truly interdisciplinary volume. With our selection of articles we hope to encourage dialogue between linguists and economists. Typically, at most universities, faculty staff working on discourse studies are hardly aware of related research done by economists who are just one or two offices away. And the other way round: economists do not always realize that the foreign language and communication trainers in their economics programmes are also busy doing research that sheds an altogether new light on the very concepts that they have been using for a long time. To that extent, this volume is meant to be something of an eye opener.

As an example, consider the entrepreneurial terminology, which is a central topic in the more linguistically oriented articles in this volume: the question can and should be raised if it would not be a good idea to investigate how the positive valuation of the entrepreneur has gradually emerged in economics and business. This is exactly what the article by Campbell Jones and André Spicer further on in the volume is focused on. Hence, we would like to suggest that the critique of enterprise culture in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis can learn a great deal from economic research on the topic. And – again – the other way round of course: Jones and Spicer's own efforts cannot be complete without referring to some of the useful discourse-analytic work on the impact of enterprise in various settings. The present effort can therefore be called ‘transdisciplinary’ in that we seek to work *across* disciplines (Chiapello & Fairclough 2002).

Data

All contributions to this volume are essentially empirical, focusing on the details of actual language use. The type of data analysed range from the minutes of university policy meetings and relatively large-scale corpora of newspaper language, over books of economic theory from both well-respected economists and monetary cranks, to cartoons from *The Economist*. Some papers go back far in time to trace the origin and the history of economic terms which are used today. In itself, this variety of sources reflects the all-pervasiveness of the economic discourse.

Method

As far as method is concerned, a wide range of approaches are included in this volume, from Critical Discourse Analysis and ethnography to cognitive linguistics and discourse-historical close reading. The editors stress that they have an outspoken preference for a pluralistic attitude when dealing with this kind of transdisciplinary studies.

Overview

The present volume is divided into three parts: critique, method and history.

Critique

The articles in the first part present various sorts of critique of the marketization of discourse in a number of institutional settings.

Zooming in on the management of language in call centres, Deborah Cameron provides a sociolinguistic perspective on the forms of corporate capitalism which are associated with economic globalization. Among other concepts, she explores foreign language competence, styling, gendered speech and authenticity.

Gerlinde Mautner traces for-profit discourse in the nonprofit sector, including in the external communications of universities. She concludes that the hegemony of business in society at large is such that marketised forms of language are in the process of becoming fully absorbed into previously noncommercial discourse. The traces left by this process of absorption are often opaque rather than transparent, creating a need for a critical approach.

Geert Jacobs and Katja Pelsmaekers explore the relationship between education and the market by analysing the merger of two Belgian schools of applied economics. They focus on the role of the student in the newly merged school and on the merger communication itself.

Method

The papers in the second part have a more methodological orientation.

Drawing on metaphor study, Geert Brône and Kurt Feyaerts show how double grounding as a strategy of conceptual integration can help analyse headlines and cartoons in the economic press. One of their conclusions is that next to the obvious function of eye-catching, lexically ambiguous elements provide the discourse with an additional highlighting of the central thematic concept.

Just like Brône and Feyaerts, Paul Sambre works within the tradition of cognitive linguistics. He refers to blended conceptualisation to explain the use of French and Italian verbs of rising in the description of trade flow diagrams. He shows that fictive motion presents a part-whole metonymy in that it profiles some data while backgrounding others. At the same time, since language is clearly not the only locus of human cognition, he calls for a multi-modal analysis of similar data.

Chris Braecke presents a close reading of two articles from the *Financial Times* on what he calls the 'model debate': viz. the stakeholder model vs. the shareholder model in European business media. His is a pilot study that is meant to pave the way for future large-scale corpus research in this area.

History

The three papers in the final part of this volume present a historical perspective on discourse and economics.

Peter Rosner uses pre-Keynesian macro-economic writing to demonstrate the crucial impact of storytelling in economics. His analysis of early business cycle metaphors reveals that the *Weltanschauungen* of economists have played a major role in the economic debate. However, he argues that it would be wrong to assume that opposing views in economics are simply a matter of convictions.

Campbell Jones and André Spicer trace the meaning and valuation of entrepreneurship in economics from the eighteenth through the twentieth century. They suggest that the way entrepreneurship is conceived of is practically relevant to economic life. Adopting a critical perspective on the history of entrepreneurship in economic theory they conclude that valuation in economic discourse is determined by the political and cultural context in which it takes place.

Finally, Walter Van Trier sets out to investigate how the fate of the famous 'Social Credit' movement of Major Douglas was crucially influenced by the journalist Alfred Richard Orage. Based upon a detailed analysis of both Douglas's and Orage's writings, he shows that Orage has made a far more substantial contribution to Douglas's 'Social Credit' movement than has so far been acknowledged.

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PART I

Critique

Chapter 1

Communication and commodification

Global economic change
in sociolinguistic perspective

Deborah Cameron

1. Introduction

In this chapter I will focus on some of the sociolinguistic consequences of economic globalization, or perhaps more accurately of the forms of corporate capitalism which are associated with that globalization. Globalization has been defined (Waters 1995: 3) as a "process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and people become increasingly aware they are receding". The emergence of a globally organized capitalism is only one dimension of the process; other developments relevant to my argument here include the ability of people and organisations to communicate very rapidly across vast distances using new technologies; the tendency of ideas and cultural products to spread quickly from place to place; and the growth of what some commentators have dubbed 'semiotic production', in other words the fact that fewer people are now engaged in making material objects and more people are working with signs and symbols. I want to argue that recent changes in the way capitalist enterprises conceptualize and manage their operations have produced, among other things, a new attitude to language. Rather than taking language for granted as the ordinary, unremarkable medium of social interaction, corporations are increasingly seeing it as a resource to be actively managed. It becomes less like air – something you cannot live without but do not usually have to think about, or pay for – and more like money, a commodity with a market value, whose careful management yields predictable rewards. At the same time, language differs from many other resources or commodities in the sense that managing *language* really means managing the uses and interpretations made of it by human language-*users*. Though there is evidence that many contemporary capitalist organizations do think and talk about 'managing *language*' (see e.g. the case studies in Czerniawska 1998), what they are usually in practice doing, or attempting to do, is primarily to manage the linguistic behaviour of their employees. The exploitation of linguistic resources, in other words, cannot be separated from the exploitation of human resources more broadly. Below I will consider some of the implications of this point.

2. Language as a valuable commodity

2.1 Foreign language competence

To make the notion of 'managing language' more concrete, let us consider the example of Customer Assets, a call centre in Bangalore, India. Customer Assets has contracts with various American companies to provide telephone service to their customers in the United States. The customers do not know that the American companies they are doing business with have outsourced their call centre service to far-off Bangalore, and the companies do not want them to guess. Therefore, the Indian call centre operators must pretend to be Americans on the phone. They are intensively trained to produce authentic American pronunciation; they spend time watching American TV and reading magazines to make sure they have got their idioms right; they are asked to invent fictional personal histories as Americans and to give themselves American-sounding names. One operator interviewed in the *New York Times*, a woman whose Bengali name is CJ Suman, calls herself Susan Sanders when she answers the phone. If customers ask, she says she is from Chicago, and has a business degree from the University of Illinois. At other centres in Bangalore, which now has a considerable concentration of them, operators are pretending to be Australian or British. India is not unique in this respect. In 2001 the Madrid-based newspaper *El Pais* reported that in the Spanish North African enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, call centre operators with Arab names are talking to customers on the Spanish mainland in impeccable Castilian.

In the relatively new phenomenon of the 'offshore' call centre we see layers of social and linguistic complexity. The fact that this work gets exported from centre to periphery – North America to India, Spain to North Africa – reflects the general logic of a globalized economy. With few restrictions on the transnational movement of assets, companies can shift production to wherever it is cheapest: India is far cheaper than the US, where a call centre operator's starting salary is approximately ten times higher. However, in the new economy which is increasingly dominated by services and dependent on technology, low labour costs are not the only consideration. Call centres need a well-developed telecommunications infrastructure which has only recently become available in places like India. They also need a pool of potential workers who have the right skills for the work. In the case of call centres, the skills in question are primarily linguistic: operators have to be able to speak to the customer in a certain way, and in the case of offshore call centres, they have to be able to do this in the customer's language, which for many or most workers will not be their own native tongue. Second or additional language competence thus becomes a valuable commodity for individuals competing in the local labour market, for businesses competing with each other for customers, and for nations competing to attract inward investment. Language is one of the things that determines who invests where: Spanish companies cannot outsource call centre work to India, and North African businesses are not going to get contracts from Australia. Then we have the additional factor of language variety: not only do Bengali or North African operators have to be able to speak English or Spanish fluently, they also have to master a non-local variety of it – Indian English or Arab-accented Spanish is not good enough.

In the Canadian province of Ontario, where Monica Heller and a team of associates are looking at the effects of economic and cultural change on the French-speaking minority, call centres serving the domestic rather than international market have identified bilingualism as a valuable commodity: they are prepared to pay bonuses to workers who can interact with customers in either English or French. This demand for bilingual workers might seem to favour members of Ontario's francophone minority, who certainly need the money, since the industries that traditionally employed them are now in terminal decline. Economically depressed areas with significant francophone communities have made efforts to attract call centres for precisely this reason. But it has turned out that the local bilinguals are not the 'right kind' of bilinguals. What the call centres value is the ability to speak standard French and standard English, without ever mixing the two languages. Members of francophone communities in Ontario do not fit this definition of bilingualism as, in Heller's phrase, 'double monolingualism'. The French they speak is a local vernacular variety, and code switching is a normal part of their behaviour. Paradoxically, therefore, the ideal bilingual call centre operator is more likely to be an anglophone who learnt their French at school – or an educated francophone from a French majority area like Quebec – than a local person from a genuinely bilingual community.

In each of the two cases just described, the offshore call centre in Bangalore and the bilingual call centre in Ontario, there is a disjunction between the language that indexes identity for local communities and the language that has high value as a market commodity. Companies cannot get what they want simply by situating a call centre in a region where bilingual workers are available and then letting the workers get on with it. Workers' ability to speak two languages is the basic raw material, but companies expect to mould it to their own specific requirements. They must invest, therefore, in processes that add value to the language workers bring with them: designing ways of speaking and training workers to produce them.

2.2 Styling

These processes are also observable in monolingual contexts; indeed they were the focus of my own research on British call centres (Cameron 2000a, 2000b). In Britain, the code itself is a given – workers speak a basically standard English with the accent of the locality where the centre is situated. But this does not mean no effort is made to add value to employees' existing ways of speaking. Rather, it means the effort is put into other aspects of communicative performance, those a sociolinguist would gloss as discourse style or interactional style – especially those aspects of style which are most relevant to the construction of interpersonal and affective meanings. Attention is paid to features like pitch, loudness, rate of speech, level of formality, the address forms and politeness formulas operators use, the way they ask questions, the attitudes and emotions they project through their words, intonation and voice quality.

I have called this regulation of interpersonal aspects of discourse 'styling', contrasting it to the technique of 'scripting', which many call centres also use. Scripting – writing down a form of words which must be repeated verbatim – is a way to control *what* operators say, and it is used to ensure that they manage business transactions efficiently and predictably. Styling, on the other hand, is an attempt to regulate *how* operators say things, and it generally exemplifies the phenomenon Norman Fairclough (1989) has dubbed 'synthetic personalization': it is intended to compensate for the impersonality of a scripted or formulaic transaction by giving customers the impression that the operator genuinely cares about them as an individual. Styling practices are designed to create rapport with the caller, display empathy with the caller's feelings, show explicit concern for the caller and provide evidence that the operator is positively disposed to the caller. What all this involves in concrete terms is a discourse style that is towards the informal end of the spectrum, markedly co-operative, emotionally expressive and larded with markers of positive politeness – the kind of politeness that connotes closeness and approval of the other rather than distance and reluctance to impose on the other. Below is a sample of the instructions given to operators at three British call centres.

- *Smiling*

1. Remember, smiling can be heard as well as seen (*employee manual*).
2. Have a smile in your voice and avoid sounding abrupt (*telephone performance guidelines*).

- *Using intonation 'expressively' to project emotion/attitude*

1. Remember voice intonation is also very important… You must never sound bored on a call. Your telephone manner should convey the impression that you have been waiting for that individual call all day. …Our commitment is to give the caller an impression of excitement, friendliness, helpfulness and courtesy (*manual for directory assistance operators*).
2. The objective at the beginning of a call is to demonstrate sincerity and warmth. Try to make the caller feel you are there for them… [avoid] a disinterested, monotonous tone to voice (*telephone performance guidelines, insurance company*).
3. The depth of pitch in the staff's voice will determine the degree of sincerity and confidence associated with the message they are giving the caller (*appraisal checklist used by 'mystery callers', i.e. people posing as genuine customers who are actually employed by the company to report back on operators' performance*).

- *Active listening*

  Use words of acknowledgement: yes, OK, thank you, I understand, I see. … [avoid] disruptive, disinterested or challenging use of listening acknowledgements, and using the same listening acknowledgement throughout the call (*telephone performance guidelines, insurance company*).

- *Rapport/demonstrating empathy*

  Creating a rapport and showing empathy is about adding the human touch to a business call relationship… This means treating the caller as a person, recognising their situation and building a genuine conversation to reflect this. … Use language which conveys understanding of and empathy for the caller's individual situation, e.g. 'are you OK?' 'was anyone hurt?' 'that must have been very distressing for you' (*telephone performance guidelines, insurance company*).

These instructions come from employee manuals and training materials, and from the checklists used by supervisors, managers and 'mystery callers' to appraise employees' performance. They are of course specifications for the ideal way of speaking rather than descriptions of real speech behaviour, but employees who consistently ignore the specifications know they are taking a risk. Surveillance in call centres is extensive – supervisors can listen in silently to any call, and calls are also taped for later assessment.

2.3 Gendered speech

In offshore call centres like the ones in Bangalore it is easy to see that a particular language variety is being commodified – workers have to take on a clearly 'foreign' speech persona, pretending to be American or Australian by adopting American or Australian English. In the British case by contrast I would argue that what is being commodified is not an ethnic, national or regional form of speech but a *gendered* one. Anyone familiar with the literature on language and gender will probably have noticed a striking resemblance between the prescribed discourse style for call centre operators and the folklinguistic stereotype of 'women's language'. This is not a coincidence. Synthetic personalization in service work is the linguistic concomitant of what sociologists of work call 'emotional labour' (Hochschild 1983) – the work of managing your own and others' feelings. And the management of feelings, generally speaking, is culturally coded as a female domain. Women make up approximately 70% of call centre operators in the UK, and when asked about this gender imbalance, managers often invoke women's allegedly natural ability to produce the required communication style, as in the following extract from an interview between a call centre manager and a sociologist.

> The vast, vast majority of the agents we select are women… [women] just seem to fit better, they're better at it… we are looking for people who can chat to people, interact, build rapport. What we find is that women can do this more, they're definitely more natural when they do it anyway. It doesn't sound as forced, perhaps they're used to doing it all the time anyway… women are naturally good at that sort of thing. I think they have a higher tolerance level than men… I suppose we do, yes, if we're honest about it, select women sometimes because they are women rather than because of something they've particularly shown in the interview. (Tyler & Taylor 1997: 10)

This sort of comment reflects a long history in which women were identified with the private sphere of home, family and intimate relationships, while men were identified with the public sphere of commerce, politics and the professions. In the past, women's alleged inability to master the communicative norms of the public sphere – formal, impersonal, rational and instrumental – was used as a reason to exclude them from various kinds of paid employment. But in an economy dominated by the provision of services, where rival products are often interchangeable and competitive advantage depends on less tangible factors, the more emotionally expressive, empathetic and caring style associated with non-market transactions in the private sphere becomes a valuable commodity in the sphere of business and commerce. The ability to deploy this style of speech becomes a form of what Bourdieu (1991) calls 'linguistic capital', different from, but in present-day conditions arguably becoming as significant as, the literacy and standard language competence to which Bourdieu originally applied the term. What the manager quoted earlier is saying is that he considers women better raw material than men, easier to mould into the right kinds of language-users because they start out with more of the desired linguistic capital. This does not mean he can simply leave the women he employs to do whatever comes naturally: they are subject to the usual regime of styling and surveillance. But he and others like him see it as logical to exploit the continuities that clearly do exist between femininity as performed outside the workplace and customer service as performed in the new economy.

So far, I have been explaining and illustrating the argument that language in the new service economy is viewed as a commodity. Companies increasingly see it as necessary to add value to the linguistic raw material embodied in their employees, by designing a way of interacting which is believed to appeal to customers, training workers to reproduce the prescribed design in their behaviour, and keeping them under surveillance to make sure they stick to the specifications. But this strategy raises certain problems and contradictions which businesses have to contend with, and I want now to turn to two of them in particular: the issue of authenticity, and the issue of skills.

3. Authenticity

One of the most striking things about the management of language in call centres is that it treats speech as detachable from the speaker. It assumes a very high degree of linguistic flexibility or plasticity on the part of workers; at Customer Assets in Bangalore, operators are expected to be both able and willing to produce a language unconnected to their social location, personal history or cultural experience. This is not an unproblematic expectation, because it runs counter to what is still the dominant understanding of spoken language as a particularly direct and natural expression of the speaker's authentic identity – both her social location in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, nationality and regional provenance, and her personality as a unique individual. When the case of Customer Assets was reported in the western media, critical commentary focused mainly on this issue of authenticity, or rather, inauthenticity. The Indian writer Arundhati Roy, for instance, called it 'demeaning to Indian workers' to oblige them to conceal their Indian identities. But when workers at Customer Assets were interviewed by the media they did not seem to feel demeaned. Instead they stressed that they were well rewarded financially for their ability to pass as Americans.

Yet this draws attention to a paradox: authenticity does matter, in the sense that the goal of the Indian workers is to sound like *authentic* Americans. The customer is not supposed to guess that the person on the other end of the phone is not what she sounds like. The strategy can only work because most people still do see the way someone speaks as an authentic expression of the self rather than a calculated performance which may have nothing to do with the speaker's real identity. The same point applies to the synthetic personalization of service styles in Britain. In instructions to operators like the ones quoted above, the ideal speech style is recurrently described using words like 'genuine', 'natural' and 'sincere'. What is valued most is the ability to simulate the prescribed qualities and dispositions without giving the customer any reason to question that they are authentic expressions of your real personality and feelings.

The existence of these contending views about what language is or should be is currently giving rise to both ideological and material conflict in workplaces. My own informants who worked in call centres clearly had not all internalized the new understanding of language as a commodity to be exploited for maximum gain, rather than an inalienable part of the individual self. For instance, one topic that came up repeatedly was how they felt about being abused by angry callers – a common occurrence in call centres, as I observed for myself during my fieldwork. The rules in most call centres forbid operators to retaliate or just hang up when callers abuse them, and my informants resented that. Managers often responded by telling them not to take it so personally. In their view, the abuse was not being directed to the operator as a real person; it was the corporate persona callers were attacking. In interviews with me, managers told me they found it frustrating when operators seemed unable to distinguish the two. Operators on the other hand found it contradictory to be told both to simulate genuine personal relationships with customers, and to be told not to take what customers said to them personally.

Elsewhere in the service sector, workers do seem to have taken the commodity view on board. For the San Francisco telephone sex workers whose linguistic performance has been described by the anthropologist Kira Hall (1995) the rule is to be whoever the client wants you to be, because that is how you maximise your earnings. If he wants a breathy voiced bimbo or a super-subservient Asian women who just says 'yes sir' and 'no sir' then that's what you give him; after all, he's paying you by the minute so it is absolutely in your interest to keep him on the line for as long as possible. Hall found white women impersonating Black women, Latinas performing as white women and at least one man performing a whole range of feminine sexual personae. The workers Hall spoke to were extremely conscious of the commodity status of their discourse, and prided themselves on their ability to manage language in accordance with the client's preferences.

Another interesting case is that of flight attendants working for Hong Kong's Cathay Pacific Airlines. In 1999 their union got into dispute with the airline about a new regulation which required attendants to work additional hours to earn an annual raise that had previously been automatic. The dispute itself had nothing to do with communication, but the union's strategy did: they announced that unless and until the airline backed down on the extra hours, attendants would refuse to smile at passengers for one hour of every flight. This strategy clearly recognizes the status of smiling on the job as emotional labour, and the smile itself as a piece of synthetic personalization. Worse yet, it proposes to reveal that to the customer: if attendants stop smiling for one hour, who will believe in the sincerity of their smiles when they start again? A year earlier, women working for Safeway supermarkets in California complained that the subservient way they had to behave to customers was encouraging some men to interpret their words and actions as flirtation, and they were having to fend off unwanted sexual advances. In both these cases, women workers showed awareness that their employers were treating verbal and nonverbal communication as part of a commodified femininity. They also showed that it is possible for workers collectively to use this kind of practice against their employers. The aim of regulating service encounters in the way many businesses do is to enhance customer satisfaction and therefore customer loyalty by mobilizing positive feelings towards the organisation. If customers discover that the friendly smiles, solicitous remarks and comfortingly familiar midwestern accents are not authentic after all, then they are more likely to feel duped and