Linguistic Analysis of Academic Discourse

The Example of PhD Students' Articles

Françoise BOCH

LIDILEM, Grenoble 3, France
http://w3.u-grenoble3.fr/lidilem/labo/

Why Describe Academic Discourse ?

- From a linguistic point of view :
- To identify conventions and argumentative strategies to build a disciplinary culture (Hyland, 2006)

"We cannot separate our view of the work of science from our view of the praxis by which the work is realised"

(Bazerman, 1988)

Why Describe Academic Discourse ?

■ From an educational point of view :

➢ To raise awareness of the procedures by which we "construct" a field.

➢ To bring to light students' writing practices -as well as our own.

« A better understanding of texts and their structural properties has important applications to writing instructions and reading comprehension »

(Tardi & Swales, 2008)

How to Describe Academic Discourse ?

- Two general issues have been the focus of recent studies (US, UK & continental Europe) :

  - ➢ **Research field** (cf. Hyland & Bondi 2006) and **national culture** : the common and specific features in different scientific disciplines or in different languages (Fløttum & al. 2007, KIAP project)

How to Describe Academic Discourse ?

- Donahue (2008) : in Europe, one emerging focus (among others) :

  - The degree of expertise of authors : what are students' and experts' lexico-grammatical strategies in journal articles ? (Rinck 2006)

A linguistic analysis

- 3 theoretical issues (Fløttum, 2003, KIAP project)

  1. Authorial presence and stance
  2. The author's self-promotion in their research
  3. **The expression of other researchers' voice(s)**

PhD students' articles

- A dual status

  Training to be a researcher by doing research

- ➤ To be a scientific author requires full responsibility of one's own assertions.
- ➤ PHD students then face one major problem: they still consider themselves as writers-to-be

# How do authors refer to others? (Rinck, Boch et Grossmann, 2007)

- ◾ Corpus of 44 French linguistic articles (1998-2003)

– 22 articles by experts

– 22 articles by PhD students

- ◾ Hypothesis

- PhD students follow academic conventions more than experts (Bourdieu, 2001)

- Their way of referring to other authors is more canonical

Reference to sources

- Variety of ways to refer to sources

1. Document : author's name + date *(Chomsky, 1993)*

2. List of documents (*Sperber & Wilson, 1989 ; Rossi, 1971 ; Di Cristo, 1978*)

3. Author's name *(d'après Searle; la linguistique saussurienne*)

4. Name of approach or schools of thought *(les structuralistes, la grammaire transformationnelle)*

5. General mention *(les études sur, les définitions de…)*

6. No mention of source (*il a été montré que…*)
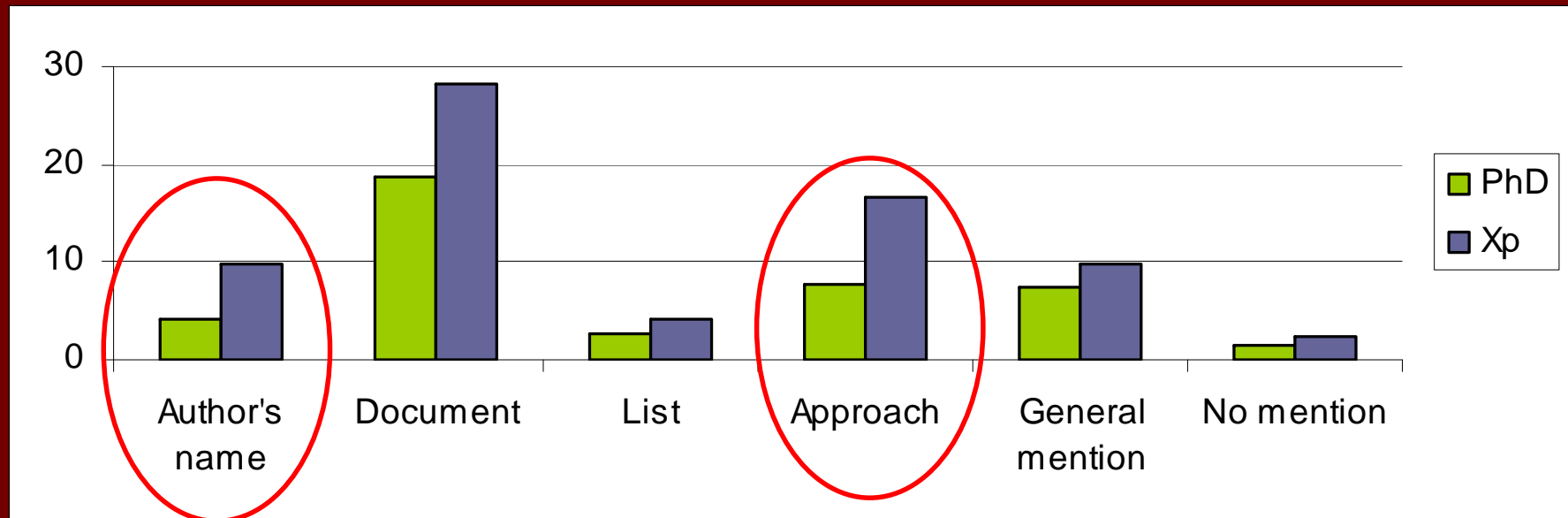
Reference to sources

■ Number of references
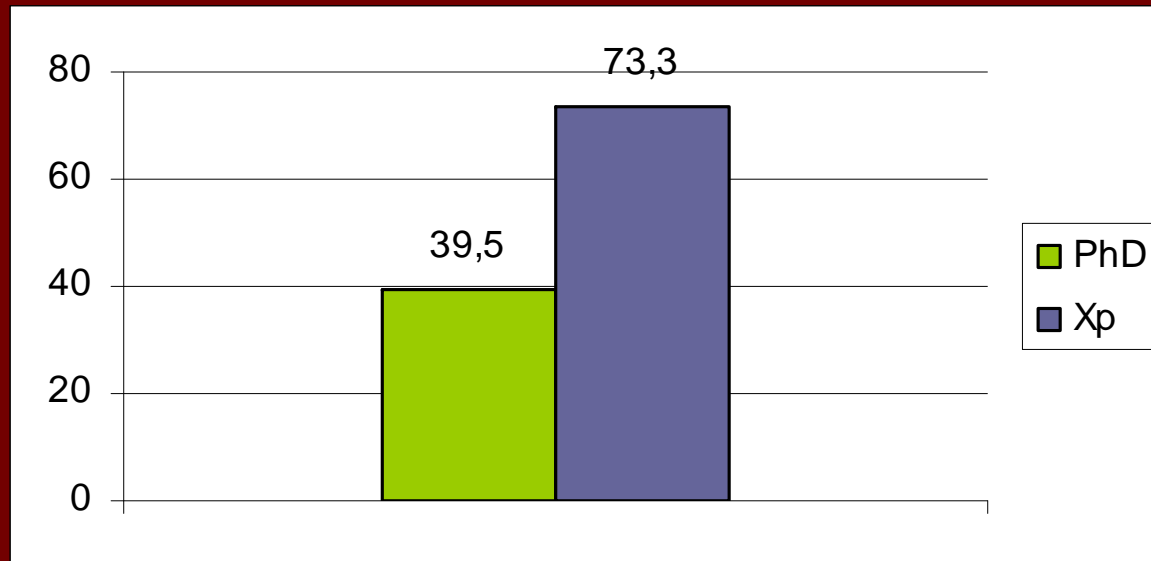
■ Fewer for the PhD students (Ave. 39,5 vs. 73,3)
■ But never less than 8 references per paper

Reference to sources

- Types of references

- Fewer names of authors (*saussurien*) or schools (*les structuralistes*)

Reference to sources

- Canonical use of genre
  - Number of references
  - References to texts (author + date)
- Field knowledge : "showing"
- Legitimacy
  - Assuming the role of a field expert
  - Overview of the field

Conclusion (1)

- Unique features of PhD students' articles
  - Canonical model of the article
  - Guiding the reader

- Teaching implications
  - How to teach the article genre?
  - The use of articles as models for PhD students?

Conclusion (2)

- Two areas for further research

  – Evolution of the novice's model

  – Evolution of the genre : influence of the domination of English in academia

Bazerman, C. (1988), *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science.*,University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, Wisconsin.

Bourdieu, P. (2001), *Science de la science et réflexivité*, Cours du collège de France, Paris, Raisons d'agir.

Donahue, C. (2008), *Écrire à l'université. Analyse comparée en France et aux États-Unis,* Editions du Septentrion, Coll. Éducation et didactiques.

Hyland, K., Bondi, M. & Gotti, M. (2006), *Academic Discourse Across Disciplines,* Peter Lang.

Fløttum, K., Dahl, T., et Kinn, T. (2006), *Academic Voices. Across languages and disciplines*, Amsterdam - Philadelphia, John Benjamins.

Rinck, F., Boch, F., Grossmann, F. (2007), Quelques lieux de variation du positionnement énonciation dans l'article de recherche, *Variations au coeur et aux marges de la sociolinguistique,* L'Harmattan, 285-296.

Tardi, C. & Swales, J. (2008), Form, Text Organization, Genre, Coherence, and Cohesion, *Handbook of Research of Writing* (ed. C. Bazerman), LEA, chap. 35, 565-581.

« As teachers, if we provide our students with only the formal trappings of the genres they need to work in, we offer them nothing more than unreflecting slavery to current practice and no means to ride the change that inevitably will come in the forty to fifty years they will practice their professions. We do better to grant ourselves and our students means to understand the forms of life embodied in current symbolic practice, to evaluate the consequences of the received rhetoric, and to attempt to transform our rhetorical world when such transformation appears advisable. »

Bazerman (1988)