Interdisciplinary Variation in Academic Discourse: The Case Of Cases In Business And Law

The project

The aim of this project is to examine the complexity of the nature and range of communication demands placed on Business students within the increasing interdisciplinary curriculum, and to what extent these demands vary across disciplines.
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**Background**

A widespread concern about the declining standards of English competence in the student population;

Many of the traditional English courses appear to be insufficient to help students cope with the complexity of the communication demands required;

The dynamic complexity of present-day workplace practices has made universities change the nature of their academic programmes, to make them increasingly interdisciplinary (Bhatia, 1999: 129);

Thus, there is a need to rethink, revise and redesign pedagogical procedures to make them more effective.

**The Main Objectives**

To investigate and to explore the complexity of interdisciplinary nature of discourses in the academy;

More specifically to analyse cases/case studies from five disciplines: Accounting, Economics, Law, Management, and Marketing;

To show how discourses in these cases/case studies differ in their linguistic forms, functional values and pedagogical applications;

To suggest measures to improve the range of communication skills needed to meet the interdisciplinary demands in Business and Legal studies.
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Research Plan and Methodology

The project studies:

A corpus of Business and Legal Cases and other academic genres relevant to Business and Legal education, e.g. textbooks, examinations and case questions, etc.;

The perceptions of Business and Legal students as revealed by them in semi-structured focus group interviews;

The individual perceptions of Business and Law teachers;

The individual perceptions of specialists in the workplace;

Student writing performance on tasks set by Business and Law teachers.

Some of the Research Questions to be Addressed

Do cases/case studies in Business and Law constitute the same/similar genres?

What are the generic characteristics (linguistic forms, rhetorical patterns and cognitive structures underlying these specialized discourses)?

Are there any differences among these discourses, and if so, how these differences are represented in the five disciplines?

To what extent are disciplinary specialists (both teachers and students) aware of the subject-specific frames that underlie their practices?

Expected Outcomes

Some of the fundamental and pedagogically important disciplinary differences will be highlighted, e.g. differences in the use of specialist words/lexis, the nature of rhetorical structures, patterns of textualizations, and the nature and development of arguments in different disciplines;

Relevance of such interdisciplinary variation to the teaching and learning of English communication skills, the development of language curriculum, learner assessment, program evaluation, and more generally to the study of Business and Law.