Technical English Course

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Aims:

The course is intended to provide students with in-depth insights into the linguistic and overall rhetorical resources behind the production of the key-genres of scientific discourse, i.e. abstracts, research articles, research presentations and Ph.D. dissertations / defences.

Materials and methods:

In order to make participants aware of the real communicative requirements underlying scientific discourse, a corpus-based approach will be adopted. This entails making use of authentic materials drawn from authoritative sources, e.g. abstracts and research articles from international journals. First of all, each of the research genres considered will be analysed with regard to a number of key-factors at play: discourse community, communicative purpose, style, structure and intended audience. Secondly, the focus will be on the specific linguistic tools employed by the research community in order to report on their research most effectively. Linguistic features – e.g. citation practices, the use of the passive voice, hedging – will be examined through real examples and then exercised. The course is sub-divided into two parts illustrated below.

1ˢᵗ year programme

1. **An introduction to Scientific English as ESP (English for Specific Purposes)**

   ❑ General features: syntax, lexis, terminology and morphological peculiarities.

2. **Scientific Discourse: one discourse, several genres**

   ❑ An operative definition of 'genre: a closer look at scientific / academic genres.

   ❑ Narrowing the field: abstracts and research articles (RA)

   ❑ Methodological premises: aims, materials and methods of the course

3. **The abstract as a genre**

   ❑ Generic properties: definition, discourse community involved, communicative purpose, structure, style and intended audience

   ❑ Two main typologies: informative and indicative abstracts

   ❑ Tense issues: when to use the present, when to use the past

   ❑ Active and passive voice

   ❑ Evaluative lexis:

     - Collocation: conceptualization and examples
     - Reporting verbs
     - Stylistic remarks: personal pronouns, abbreviations, incomplete sentences, symbols, formality.
     - How to write an abstract: practical suggestions

4. **The research article (RA) as a genre**

   ❑ Generic properties: definition, discourse community involved, communicative purpose, structure, style and intended audience

   ❑ A focus on RA introductions:

     - The CARS (Create a Research Space) model
     - A study of rhetorical moves (*Establishing a territory*; *Establishing a niche*; *Occupying the niche*)
     - A study of steps (e.g. *Claiming centrality*; *Indicating a gap*; *Outlining purposes*)
     - Linguistic tools of moves and steps: connectives, tense usage, reporting verbs, deixis
     - The study of collocations and grammar in scientific discourse: applications of the software AntConc 3.2.1w

2nd year programme

1. **More on research articles**
   - The section on 'Methodology': linguistic tools (the passive voice in the past, NP-stacking)
   - The macro-section 'Results, Discussion and Conclusion': linguistic tools.
   - Rhetorical resources across RA sections:
     - Hedging and authorial comment
     - Definition
     - *That*-nominalizations
     - Stylistic remarks: the use of progressive forms, second person and imperatives.

2. **Research presentations as a genre**
   - Generic properties: definition, discourse community involved, communicative purpose, structure, style and intended audience
   - Organisational strategies for an effective presentation: preparation, visual supports, performance and speaker-audience interaction.
   - A real example of research presentation (Dubois 1981)

3. **Ph.D. dissertations as a genre:**
   - Generic properties: definition, discourse community involved, communicative purpose, structure, style and intended audience
   - Rhetorical and linguistic features across sections.

4. **Ph.D. defences as a genre:**
   - Generic properties: definition, discourse community involved, communicative purpose, structure, style and intended audience
   - Informality, cross-textual references, the role of humour.