

XVIth European Symposium on Language for Special Purpose (LSP):
Specialised Language in Global Communication

Colloquium proposal:

Knowledge Communication – a central issue in the Knowledge Society

In this colloquium we wish to pursue two goals: First we wish to introduce the key features of the framework of knowledge communication. Secondly we would like to explore what new insights may be gained by applying that framework unto instances of knowledge intensive communicative events.

In the **introduction part** of the colloquium, knowledge communication as a field of study will be discussed from both a research and a societal perspective (**Peter Kastberg**). The mere production of ever more specialized knowledge will not create the value added needed in order for the knowledge society to thrive and prosper. Knowledge, regardless of how profound or specialized, will not and cannot in itself create societal value. For that to happen, the knowledge produced must be communicated and thus be made available to society in one way or the other. So, for a knowledge society, the creation of knowledge is a necessary condition, but it is in itself not a sufficient condition. There are three prerequisites necessary for the knowledge society to thrive:

1. being able to produce ever more specialized knowledge,
2. being able to communicate this specialized knowledge,
3. and doing so in such a way that the knowledge may be utilized

The one predominant challenge of the knowledge society, as it were, is and will continue to be how to transform ever more specialized knowledge into interactions in order for that knowledge to gain value (outside of itself). And it is exactly that metamorphosis from 'knowledge' via 'interactions' to 'value' which is also the primary research interest of the field of knowledge communication. In order to express this particular research interest not only in 'knowledge management terms', however, but in more 'communicative' terms, we would like to suggest the following definition:

Knowledge communication is strategic action aimed at the (co-)construction of specialized knowledge structures. Being 'communication', it is inherently dialogic and transactional. Being 'strategic', it is deliberately goal-oriented, the goal being the mediation of understanding across knowledge asymmetries.

As is obvious from the above definition the field of knowledge communication engages the ideas of a wide variety of disciplines (spanning from cognition to social science). What consequences for the field of knowledge communication may we derive from that?

In the **explorative part** of the colloquium, we will discuss and subsequently demonstrate to what extent the concept of knowledge communication may be operationalized. The point of departure being that, since knowledge can no longer be understood as something one can 'measure', 'package' and 'transport' to a particular target audience, we have to take a closer look at how the dimensions of constructing and communicating knowledge interact. In this part of the colloquium we wish to elaborate on five different perspectives, each addressing a specific set of issues:

1. From the individual's perspective

Constructing specialized knowledge – from information to knowledge via learning (Ole Lauridsen)

The process of constructing knowledge is an individual's cognitive act – even if it may occur in interplay with other individuals and / or different media. A theoretical framework, i.e. Personal Knowledge Management, has been developed to address the challenges of individual knowledge construction. Personal knowledge management is, however, closely connected with the concept of constructivism.

Constructing specialized knowledge – developing knowledge via interaction (Jan Engberg)

The individual expert's cognitive process of knowledge construction is located at the interface between at least the expert's processing of domain specific texts, his or her conceptualisation of individual situations involving the area of expertise and his or her conceptualisation of the knowledge shared with other experts from the same domain. A case in point to be studied here is the development of legal concepts in the expert dialogue taking place in court judgments, text books, monographs, learned articles, newspaper discussions, etc.

But which sub category of constructivism must be taken into consideration when trying to encompass the individual's knowledge construction, and can it/how can it be operationalized?

2. From an interpersonal perspective

Communicating specialized knowledge – negotiating knowledge communication between writer and editor (Margrethe Petersen)

In communicating research findings, authors of academic journal articles face the challenge of overcoming the barriers posed by the knowledge asymmetries between (a) authors and journal readership and (b) authors and editors. Considering the general taxonomy of the submission procedure and the key role of academic journal editors, the issue of whether, regardless of the quality of the submissions received, editors are sometimes insurmountable barriers to knowledge communication should be debated.

Does the editorial barrier to some extent prevent the publication of knowledge that might be interesting or even valuable? Does the barrier corroborate existing knowledge rather than challenge it? If Wikipedia is a case in point, may we safely assume that editorial procedures are not merely a barrier to the communication of knowledge but sometimes even all but a killer of new knowledge?

3. From a domain specific perspective

Communicating specialized knowledge – Investor Relations and the annual report (Marianne Grove Ditlevsen)

Investor Relations is concerned with the communication of financial information to the investment community, i.e. analysts and actual and potential investors, in order to ensure that the investment community fully and accurately understands the investment potential of a particular company (Argenti 1998: 151)¹. IR can thus be seen as the mediation of specialized knowledge across knowledge asymmetries and the annual report, one of the most important means of IR, as an instance of knowledge communication.

¹ Argenti, Paul (1998): *Corporate Communication*. Boston: McGraw-Hill.

But how is specialized knowledge communicated across a vast variety of knowledge asymmetries in the annual report as a means of Investor Relations?

4. From a media perspective

(Co-)constructing specialized knowledge – Internet texts as a case in point (Constance Kampf)

Looking at the question of the role writing plays as communities engage in technological and social change in local and increasingly global contexts, we approach writing from a knowledge communication perspective—situating writing as a reification of knowledge processes in discourse communities. Working from Bazerman's definition of writing as social action, and combining it with Wenger's definition for communities of practice which relies on participation and reification occurring in conjunction with written documents, we can understand Internet texts as reifications in an ongoing social action of producing knowledge.

What are the implications for technical communicators in approaching writing as knowledge communication situated in social action?

5. From a multimedia / multimodal perspective

Communicating specialized knowledge - multimedial and multimodal settings (Carmen Daniela Maier)

Specialized knowledge is usually communicated today in multimedial and multimodal settings. This situation has given birth to knowledge asymmetries regarding the affordances of the multimedial and multimodal means through which specialized knowledge can be accessed and understood by the new generations of students.

How should we employ theoretical positions that can describe and explain the affordances and significance of multimodal and multimedial means in the context of knowledge communication in order to minimize this type of knowledge asymmetries?

All contributors are associate professors at the Department for Language and Business Communication, The Aarhus School of Business, Denmark. They are all affiliated with the department's research unit on *Knowledge Communication*. Please see separate CV document.