COMPLEX NOUN PHRASES AS A MARKER OF CULTURAL VARIATION IN TECHNICAL ENGLISH

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Abstract:

Language evidences the cultural influences of the mother tongue of its users, and this creates different ways to express the same discourse or more specifically, the same genre. As an example, technical texts reflect the social self-image of writers and their own perceptions of reality. But the correct understanding of technical texts is crucial to communicate technical knowledge to writers with different cultural backgrounds; so we asked ourselves the following questions: Can technical writing vary depending on the cultural background of the writer? Can we distinguish an article written by a native writer (NW) and a non-native writer (NNW)? Are NNWs culturally influenced and so they use some parts of the sentence, which do not have equivalence in their mother tongue, less than NWs? We questioned all these topics in order to measure the cultural influence of the mother tongue in the frequency of complex noun phrases (CNPs) in technical texts.

The cultural variations are caused because a language does not use the same structures, terms and devices in its different manifestations and this is easily seen when we compare texts from different writers. The internal structure of the genre within a particular professional or academic context restricts the form of the linguistics resources and the functional values they assume in the discourse. Everybody needs to be familiar with a genre before one can interpret the genre-content correctly. Anna Duszak (1997: 9) adds to this idea: 'Recent insights into academic writing have shown considerable variation in text characteristics across fields, languages and cultures.[…] Among the most notable differences are field-and culture-bound disparities in global organization schemata of texts.'

These specific characteristics in the different cultural manifestations of writing have provided a wide field to investigate for language researchers. Technical language owns peculiar features associated with technical thinking, but cultural influences vary

these characteristics. The English language uses particular structures in scientific English, but to a large extend, it can be given a psycholinguistic explanation, since it is the result of applying the concepts and vocabulary of sciences addressed exclusively to a specific group or professionals. CNPs are used to condensate the concepts that the writer wants to transmit, but this characteristic is a cultural concept due to the synthesizing nature of the English language.

Technical writing differs from other genres in being very formal and direct and so, rhetorical expressions, metaphors, colloquial expressions, etc. are avoided. As Anna Duszak (1997: 2) points out 'All this contributed to the image of a dehumanised language of science, and likewise to the image of a dehumanised writer [...] uniformity of academic writing styles was taken for granted and was accounted for in terms of objectivized research standards.'

In this study we prove that there is not a standardization of the use of English, as noun phrases are used in a different way by NWs and NNWs in technical English.