

Tamsin Sanderson  
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg  
Tamsin.Sanderson@anglistik.uni-freiburg.de

### **Corpus-based approaches to discourse analysis: rhetorical self-fashioning strategies in academic writing**

The paper presents selected findings from a recently completed research project on written academic discourse across cultures, based on a one million word parallel corpus of English and German-language scholarly articles. The results of the study, which concentrates on phenomena such as meta-communication, inter-textuality and hedging, not only shed light on salient contrasts between academic styles, but also have wider implications for future studies of discourse across cultures and also for ESP pedagogy.

In research into academic discourse there has so far been both a perceived and a real conflict between top-down discourse analytic and bottom-up corpus linguistic methodologies. By focussing on specific findings from the study – in particular on rhetorical self-fashioning strategies in academic writing – the paper is able to demonstrate ways in which these two approaches can be combined, thereby opening up new directions for research in both areas.

One of the most interesting features of academic discourse is the tension between the impersonality traditionally regarded as characteristic of the ideal-type scientist, and the personal identity, transmitted through writing, which is inseparable from each real academic author. By choosing between different ways of positioning and representing themselves and others via language, academic authors both construct and reveal multi-dimensional identities. Within the bounds of a specific genre, authors also exercise their freedom to create different kinds of communicative situations – monologic or rather dialogic, more or less formal – and claim membership of different kinds of academic, cultural and social groups. Among other factors, these choices are influenced by the author's cultural and linguistic background and gender. By drawing upon a corpus designed for discourse analysis, and therefore balanced for such variables, it is possible to examine the influence of these external factors on language choices made by academics in their written production. The analysis goes beyond the quantitative/qualitative dichotomy to explore questions of which methodological approach is fitted to which target of analysis, and presents a new, flexible model for corpus-assisted discourse research.