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How do postgraduate students recontextualise "doing research" as a social practice? A critical analysis using Van Leeuwen's socio-semantic model

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The main objectives of this paper are, first, to present Van Leeuwen's Critical Discourse Analytical framework (1993, 1995, 1996, 2008, 2009a), and next, to explore the usefulness of this theory for Academic Language and Learning (ALL) practice in tertiary education settings. ALL advisers and lecturers are engaged in a wide and diverse range of professional practices, ranging from academic skills counselling for first-year students to enhancing the written English of international MA or PhD candidates (www.aall.org.au/who). When discussing the relevance of Van Leeuwen's socio-semantic model, the focus in this article will be on the dialectic relationship between the process of doing research and research discourse, and more specifically, on how MA and PhD students recontextualise research as a social practice. It will be suggested that some of the ways in which research is routinely talked or written about are a potential barrier to novice researchers' understanding of what conducting research and academic writing really entail; what is more, these misconceptions may negatively affect their self-efficacy and performance. Throughout, the argument will be that Van Leeuwen's discourse-analytical framework is particularly well suited for both problematising and unravelling the disconnect between "doing research" and "talking (about) research", and that the insights it generates can inform current ALL practice and future ALL development. Given the space limitations, exposition, analysis and discussion will be selective and illustrative rather than conclusive.

Key Words: social practice, recontextualisation, linguistic representation, postgraduate supervision.

1. Introduction

This paper offers a brief introduction to Van Leeuwen's theory of discourse as recontextualisation. At the same time, it discusses a number of insights relevant to academic language and learning (ALL) practice. These insights are based on my own discourse-analytic research into the recontextualisation and representation of "doing research" as an academic practice. In this section, I will first discuss the relationship between Van Leeuwen' socio-semantic model and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and next, describe the data sources that I rely on.

1.1. Social actors approach

Van Leeuwen's work is generally situated within the CDA research paradigm, and more particularly, the "British" systemic-functional trend represented by Norman Fairclough, Gunter

Kress and their collaborators (Krzyżanowski, 2010, p. 67). Van Leeuwen's "socio-semantic" model is concerned with the semantic resources of discourse for representing social practices. The term can be traced back to Halliday's (1994) systemic-functional linguistics, and its focus on studying "the socio-semantics of text", i.e. "the meanings of language in use in the textual processes of social life" (Eggins, 2004, p. 2).

However, the theoretical premise of Van Leeuwen's work is not so much Hallidayan functionalism as the "primacy of practice": (semiotic) representation is ultimately based on what social actors *do*, on individual people permanently constituting and reproducing social structure. His theoretical antecedents include, among others, Bronisław Malinowski, Talcott Parsons, Basil Bernstein, Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. It is for this reason that Wodak and Meyer (2009a, pp. 26-27) use the term "Social Actors Approach" to refer to Van Leeuwen's CDA approach. What unites Van Leeuwen and other CDA strands (such as the Discourse-Historical Approach; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) is their interest in "the critique of dominant discourses and genres that effect inequalities, injustices and oppression in contemporary society" (Van Leeuwen, 2009b, p. 278). The adjective "critical" thus means that the approach is oriented towards critiquing and changing society instead of merely describing, understanding or explaining it. For a general introduction to CDA, see Wodak and Meyer (2009b) and Krzyżanowski (2010, pp. 67-75), among others.

1.2. Data sources

My own work-in-progress on the recontextualisation of "doing research" is based on data collected from a variety of semiotic sources: interviews with postgraduates and recent PhDs, handbooks for new academics, research methodology primers, academic writing course books, official university documents, programme guides, stock image representations of researchers, and more. In the present article, I will primarily refer to only two of them, both textual.

A first set of primary data consists of so-called "structured interview" questionnaires, i.e. "questionnaires where interviewers physically meet respondents and ask the questions face to face", using "a definite schedule of questions, from which interviewers should not deviate" (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003, p. 282). I administered the questionnaire during a postgraduate training workshop at the University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Respondents (N = 44), with average age of 31 (range 22-57), came from different faculties and departments, and included both Malaysian and international students. The average time into the MA/PhD thesis process was six months. The "structured interview" questionnaire consisted of seven open-ended questions, focussing on the respondent as an active participant in their MA/PhD research practice, the activities that they were engaged in (i.e. the actual "doing"), the evaluations of their actions and one problem-solution episode (see the Appendix). This data set is made up of 6,532 words (with an average of 149 words per respondent).

The second source – of secondary data – is a booklet aimed at providing PhD candidates with useful advice and suggestions (Khoo-Lattimore, 2011). It brings together semi-structured interviews with successful PhD-qualified scholars (N = 10), each from a different discipline (e.g. ecology, mathematics, sociology and marketing) and country (e.g. Russia, Turkey, Thailand, Malaysia and Australia). Questions focussed on the interviewees' recent PhD process: the research, the thesis and the overall experience (e.g. motivation, choice of university/supervisor, scholarships, networking, completion time, publications and work-life balance).

I will refer to the first data set as the questionnaire data, to the second as the interviews. Quotations from the first source – my own data collection – will be indicated with an eight-character code, e.g. 0824MMAO; in-text citations from the source of secondary data will be simplified, using the two-letter code KL for Khoo-Lattimore, followed by the page number.

Note that for both sets, all questions and answers were in English (the respondents' and interviewees' answers have not been edited).[1]

Two important comments are in order here: First, these data differ rather radically from the traditional "public sphere" texts and genres that CDA is interested in. Van Leeuwen's own CDA work, for example, was developed to analyse (multimodal) texts such as official government documents, news reports and advertisements, dealing with war, racism, immigration, leadership, socialisation of children and other substantive issues. To my knowledge, CDA has so far paid little attention to the critical analysis of research or the discourses that underlie its less visible recontextualisations. CDA is concerned with "social processes of power, hierarchy-building, exclusion and subordination" and the "discursive aspects of social disparities and inequalities" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009a, p. 32); at first blush, none of these concepts seem to describe the social reality of postgraduate studies.

Secondly, my focus is not on the recontextualisation of research in relation to genre, genre conventions or genre-specific practices of text production. Rather, and following Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 6), the reason that my corpus combines different text types is that it is meant to be "generically diverse but at the same time united in that all these texts represent the same social practice, or some aspect of it". This approach enables one to reconstruct the "doing research" discourses from the texts that draw on them. The relevance of this will be explained in Section 3.

2. Van Leeuwen's theory of discourse as recontextualisation

Detailed expositions of the theory of discourse as recontextualised social practice can be found in Van Leeuwen (2008, 2009b). The first published account is Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999, pp. 93-98), which is partly based on Van Leeuwen's (1993) PhD dissertation. For present purposes, it is sufficient to introduce only the key notions of discourse, social practice, recontextualisation and representation, and to illustrate the main transformations that can take place when social practices are recontextualised. Note that the term "recontextualisation" itself comes from Bernstein's (1990) work on knowledge production and pedagogic discourse. Van Leeuwen, however, broadens the concept, making the assumption that *all* discourses recontextualise social practices (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. vii).

2.1. Discourse as the recontextualisation of social practice

Van Leeuwen's "discourse and practice" theory essentially refers to a situation where some elements of one social practice (e.g. conducting a survey) are imported, or taken out of their original context, and located into another, discursive context (e.g. a research article reporting that survey, within the conventions of the academic genre). In other words, whenever social practices are written or spoken about (reported, discussed, described), they are being recontextualised.

The discursive event that does the recontextualising can also be seen, however, as a social practice in its own right (Fairclough, 2010 [1995], p. 399). Consider, for example, the laboratory report, a common genre of discipline-specific academic communication (Hyland, 2006, p. 51). The report recontextualises the laboratory experiment as a social practice but the act of recontextualisation itself – the reporting – also constitutes a social practice, involving *actions* like the writing and submitting of the report, *times* like the due date and indications as to the *mode* in which the practice has to be performed (e.g. uploaded onto the learning platform as a soft copy). In the same way, also administering the questionnaires and conducting the interviews (see Section 1.2) can be seen as different recontextualising practices.

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[1] As for the primary data, participation was voluntary and informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants before carrying out the study. As for the secondary data, their published source (Khoo-Lattimore, 2011) has been duly acknowledged and referenced.

Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 6) defines social practices as "socially regulated ways of doing things". They can be analysed in terms of the following eight elements:

- actions that make up the practice
- participants involved
- performance modes ("stage directions" as to how to carry out a particular action in the practice)
- presentation styles
- times
- locations
- resources (tools and materials)
- eligibility conditions (what qualifies a person, an object, a location, etc. to play their role in the practice).

The "presentation styles" refer to the "dress and body grooming requirements" of participants (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 10) and the "tools and materials" that "substitute" for them (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 95).

Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 19) refers to the above eight elements as making up "the structure of the social practice". What is interesting is the various ways in which all – or more often – only some of these elements get recontextualised in discourse, and how this is done linguistically. Examples and explanations will be given in Sections 2.2 and 3.

Incorporating one social practice, "doing it", into another, "talking about it", not only creates new texts (and sometimes even new genres) but also new "socially constructed ways of knowing some aspect of reality" (Van Leeuwen, 2009, p. 144), i.e. the so-called capital "D" Discourses (Fairclough, 2010 [1995]). These discourses are modelled on what people *do* and are thus based on social practices. Our knowledge of leadership, for example, is based on our perception and interpretation of what leaders *do* (Van Leeuwen, 2009, p. 145). However, this knowledge gets mediated through the many spoken and written texts on leadership and the recontextualisations that these texts privilege. It is in this sense that CDA views discourse as socially shaped and socially constitutive (Wodak & Meyer, 2009a, p. 6). It also explains why there may be several different but co-existing ways of both knowing and representing the same "object" of knowledge. To use Van Leeuwen's (2005, pp. 94-96) example, the heart can be represented through both a scientific discourse describing it as an organ that pumps blood and a discourse of love that sees it as a symbol of love. That various discourses can co-exist, compete, reinforce/subvert each other and even become entangled within the same text is frequently referred to as the "plurality of discourses" (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 6).

To conclude, recontextualisation is always a process of discursive change: the original social practice (e.g. leading an organisation) is transformed into discourse. Note that this process is neither mechanical nor straightforward: "what exactly gets transformed [and how] depends on the interests, goals and values of the context into which the practice is recontextualized" (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999, p. 96). As twenty-five years of CDA research has shown, some of the transformations involved in recontextualisation can be ideologically motivated and aimed at reproducing certain forms of social domination, power abuse and inequalities (Wodak & Meyer, 2009b).

2.2. Categories of recontextualisation

Recontextualisation of social practice can take place in different ways, including minimally the following four general categories (Van Leeuwen, 2008, pp. 17-21):

- substitution
- rearrangement
- deletion
- addition

To illustrate the conceptual distinctions, I will use the academic practice of "doing research" and how postgraduate students recontextualise that practice in the two data sets (see Section 1.2).

2.2.1. Substitution

The transformation that is the most frequent and constitutes the core of recontextualisation is *substitution*. When some elements of the social practice such as actors, actions, times or spaces are substituted, these elements can be represented in a variety of ways, some of which will be common, others noticeably or subtly different from the usual ones, e.g. use of idiomatic expressions, hyperbole, metonymy and objectivation (see Section 2.3). For example, in the questionnaires, there are 322 mentions of various participants in the research practice. Quantitative analysis shows that the MA/PhD students refer most frequently to themselves (250 instances), followed by subjects or informants (31), thesis supervisors (19), others providing assistance (16) and audience or future readers (2). Social actors that are not typically seen to be part of the social practice are also mentioned, especially family and friends (17). The same pattern holds for the interviews.

2.2.2. Rearrangement

Rearrangement refers to the fact that particular elements of the social practice are rearranged so as to better meet the purposes of the discourse into which the social practice is being recontextualised. For example, in both questionnaires and interviews, it is the order and nature of the questions that largely determine how the research process gets arranged discursively. In the questionnaires, rearrangement results from the fact that the questions about a respondent's present research activities precede those about their past (see Appendix); in the interviews, the order of the questions generally respects the chronological order inherent in the practice: writing and submitting the PhD thesis precedes the oral defence. However, the majority of questions allow both questionnaire respondents and interviewees to talk about steps in the research process regardless of where they fit into the overall sequence. One PhD candidate, for example, answered the first question, "What are you doing right now?" (see Appendix), as follows:

> Conducting some interview with institution respondents and doing a literature review and writing up my research methodology chapter. [4412MPHD]

It is unlikely that these three actions are performed in the same order in which they are recontextualised here. Recontextualisations can also involve addition and/or deletion of information, whether or not central to the social practice in question.

2.2.3. Deletion

Deletion occurs when elements such as actors or actions typical of a practice are left out because they are not deemed relevant for the purpose of a particular text. For example, the one element that is missing from most research recontextualisations – including our two data sets – is presentation style: the kinds of clothes, appearance, etc. that are prescribed or socially acceptable for the participants (e.g. wear a hair net when in the lab) or for the resources that they use (e.g. the laboratory report must be written on 8.5 x 11 inch paper with smooth edges). Similarly, certain "backstage" participants (Goffman, 1959), such as library staff or research assistants, only rarely make a discursive appearance in our data.

2.2.4. Addition

Additions involve such discursive strategies as repetitions, reactions, the statement of goals and the provision of legitimations. They are considered additions because the actual performance of the social practice itself does not express those. Goals, evaluative reactions and legitimations are *semiotic* rather than *material* actions, and thus, can only be added to the recontextualisation of the practice, not to the practice itself.

- Repetitions involve the occurrence of the same element many times in the text for the purpose of redundancy, cohesion or dramatic effect. For example, most questionnaire

respondents and interviewees repeatedly refer to time as a scarce commodity that needs to be managed: it comes with deadlines, timeframes and timelines that govern the successful performance of the activities that make up the practice, e.g. "submit the thesis within timeline" [3712MMAO] or "deadlines forced me to work a lot outside typical office hours" (KL28-29).

- Reactions involve some elements of the participants' subjective reactions that are added to the recontextualisation of the social practice. Some of the interview questions in Khoo-Lattimore (2011), for example, are aimed at eliciting emotional reactions like pride, joy or frustration. One interviewee reported that it had taken him a year to identify his research questions, eliciting the question:

  > Were you expecting that it would take so long? Were you *worried* [italics mine] before you had them that you didn't have them [i.e. research questions]? (KL37)

  A question about challenges was partly answered with "In the beginning I felt somewhat frustrated, not having time to 'immerse' myself in research" (KL40). Also the questionnaires add reactions, many of them negative: "[I am] Not satisfied at all – I need my study leave so that I can focus on my thesis" [0100MPHD].

- Goals explain the "what for" of the social practice beyond what is implied by the activities or parts of the activities themselves. "Doing research" is "something that people undertake in order to find out things in a systematic way, thereby increasing their knowledge" (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2003, p. 3). In the interviews, however, the goals of "doing research" range from giving one the opportunity to travel (KL129) to "work[ing] as a university professor" (KL117). In the questionnaire data, goals are much less in evidence; only one example could be attested: "I hope my research will give the benefits to people" [3211MMAO]. It will not always be clear from the activities themselves which goals drive the practice, and frequently, the recontextualising practice will add goals.

- Legitimation as a subcategory of recontextualisation is about explaining "why" the social practice, or some aspects of it, needs to take place or needs to take place in the way it does. For example, "[I am] Planning to write up chap. 1 for the proposal" [1904MPHD] or "[I am] Looking for journal articles related to my area/And looking for gap" [1503MPHD].

- Evaluation, finally, may include judgements of good and bad, right and wrong. One of the PhD-qualified interviewees, for example, observes that "Research is fun, especially after your papers have been published. It can be very rewarding" (KL28). In the questionnaire data, we find similar examples, e.g.: "To me, it is very tiring doing literature search but it is also fun" [3108MPHD].

Note that evaluations are not legitimations although they frequently incur legitimating discourses. While a "legitimating discourse is needed to legitimate 'moral' evaluations, other evaluations are legitimated by the practice itself, or by the goals or reactions connected to it in a given recontextualising practice" (Van Leeuwen, 1993, pp. 72-75). In the example above, the interviewee's recontextualisation of "doing research" involves positive evaluations. Even though research outcomes, such as publications, may be sufficient justification or legitimation for this judgement, others may offer different evaluations ("Rather, it is hard work" [KL66]) and different legitimations (research needs to take place because of the "knowledge, deep technical knowledge [I gain] in my field" [KL68]).

2.3. Representations

The essence of language use is choice from among alternatives. In Section 2.2 it was mentioned that MA/PhD students recontextualise participants, some more frequently than others. In Van Leeuwen's model, the analytical focus now shifts to the linguistic (and more generally, semiotic) representations of the recontextualised elements. I will limit the discussion to social actors and social actions.

2.3.1. Social actor representation

In the questionnaire and interview data, typical social actor representations include mass nouns, involving *collectivisation*, as in "people", "faculty", "Institutional Review Board", etc. Some social actors such as librarians and laboratory staff are almost exclusively represented by means of *spatialisation* (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 46): a form of *objectivation* which refers to social actors by means of a place with which they are closely associated (e.g. "the UM library"). Only very few social actors are mentioned by name (*nomination*), especially professors (usually their title and their last name as in "Prof. Overmars" [KL's interview data], sometimes followed by an apposition like "a well-known Computational Geometry expert") and to a lesser extent mentors, advisors or supervisors.

Spouses, friends and family are – if recontextualised at all – exclusively represented through *relational identification* (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 42). It does not seem appropriate (within the recontextualising practice of talking about one's PhD research or early academic career) to mention them by name. Incidentally, one explanation probably lies in assertive self-presentation and the social desirability that influences questionnaire and interview answers. By presenting themselves as independent and emotionally disengaged, the respondents and interviewees seek to establish their credibility and neutrality as researchers. This type of impression management may reflect a positivist research philosophy, in which the researcher "assumes the role of an objective analyst, coolly making detached interpretations" (Saunders et al., 2003, p. 83).

2.3.2. Social action representation

As Van Leeuwen (2008, p. 148) observes, "[t]he core of a social practice is formed by a set of actions, which may or may not have to be performed in a specific order". Unlike many other practices (e.g. a family breakfast), the academic practice of conducting research has been recontextualised in great detail. In writing, descriptions range from succinct definitions to chapter/book-length discussions of the various actions and micro-actions that make up the practice.

A useful source of information includes the many research methodology books available in the market. Rosnow and Rosenthal (2008, p. 1), for example, define "researching" as "exploring a question systematically", using the "scientific method" approach. To find out what actions researchers perform, it is also informative to read the tables of contents (headings and subheadings) that these primers provide. This approach allows one to draw up a list of the material and semiotic actions that the authors of those books regard as most constitutive of the practice.

The following overview is based on Saunders et al. (2003, pp. v-x):

> Formulate the research topic, clarify the research topic, generate research ideas, refine research ideas, turn research ideas into research projects, write a research proposal, review the literature, plan the literature search, conduct the literature search, obtain the literature, record the literature, decide on the research approach, choose a research strategy, use multi-methods, negotiate access [to data], address ethical issues, select samples, use secondary data, locate secondary data, evaluate secondary data sources, primary data collection, data analysis, overcome data quality issues, manage logistical and resource issues, use semi-structured and in-depth interviews, use questionnaires, decide what data need to be collected, design the questionnaire, administer the questionnaire, analyse quantitative data, prepare data for analysis, explore data, present data, describe data using statistics, examine relationships, differences and trends using statistics, analysing qualitative data, understand qualitative data, quantify qualitative data, and use a computer for qualitative analysis.

Compared with these and other published books on research methodology, the questionnaire data are far less specific or complete. In response to the question about research action(s) (see Appendix), the postgraduate students gave the following answers:

> collect (data/information) (14 instances), read (articles) (8), analyse/investigate (5), learn/study (5), look for/search (4), write (up)/draft (8), make a report (1), prepare/write/submit (research) proposal (4), meet supervisor (1), discuss process with friends (1), procrastinate (1), etc.

What is interesting from a socio-semantic viewpoint is not just the fact that these activities are represented (while others listed in the above overview are not) but also the *discursive strategies* and *linguistic devices* used in the representations. Different research activities (e.g. reviewing the literature and preparing data for analysis) will be recontextualised by means of different representations, especially in terms of their lexical choices. However, even the same research activity can be construed and represented in different ways. Consider the action of collecting data, something many new MA/PhD students mentioned. Alternative linguistic representations include:

Question 1: What are you doing right now?

- Collecting data from the subject [1604MMAO]
- I am on stage doing collecting data/ fieldwork at hospital and shelters. [3611MPHD]
- Doing Data Collection ⇒ prop propose the questions for interview. [3812MMAO]
- DATA COLLECTION. [1804MPHD]

In CDA, the key assumption is that these choices – whether the outcome of careful deliberation or produced quasi-automatically – are not random but motivated. Within CDA, these motivations have their origins in the *context*: the concrete discursive situation itself but also the broader context of social structures, relations, institutions, etc. As such, close analysis of what is being recontextualised and what not and the various lexico-grammatical choices involved may reveal certain hidden ideologies and power (im)balances, not only within the social practice itself ("doing research") but also relevant recontextualising practices such as research methodology primers or the questionnaires and interviews referred to in this article.

Van Leeuwen (2008, chap. 3) explains in minute detail his socio-semantic *action network* for analysing variation in social action representation (for an earlier version, see Van Leeuwen 1996). The network contains around 30 ways for representing actions and reactions in English discourse. Space limitations prevent a comprehensive overview of all these transformation processes, (sub)categories and their meanings (a summary table can be found in Van Leeuwen 2008, p. 73). To illustrate, however, the kind of descriptive granularity involved, let us look again at the "data collecting" answers given above; they are repeated here but with their linguistic analyses (in curly brackets):

- Collecting data from the subject [1604MMAO] {activated representation}
- I am on stage doing collecting data/ fieldwork at hospital and shelters. [3611MPHD] {activated representation, agentialised, use of generic "do"}
- Doing Data Collection ⇒ prop propose the questions for interview. [3812MMAO] {abstraction by means of *distillation*}
- DATA COLLECTION. [1804MPHD] {de-activated/objectivated action realised through nominalisation (process noun)}

Detailed information about the coding can be found in Van Leeuwen (2008, chap. 3). In the present context, the main observation is this: when combined with the findings for social actor representation (e.g. the frequent use of ellipsis, and its effect of backgrounding the agent), it can be concluded that this group of MA/PhD students construe the same activity with varying degrees of *agentiveness* (or individual human agency) and varying degrees of *specificity*. Note

that the last answer, i.e. "DATA COLLECTION"', almost completely downgrades the actor and action itself (as if the action of collecting data is a mere static entity).

Summing up, Van Leeuwen's model provides the tools for a *systematic* and *fine-grained* analysis of what is happening in and through texts, what kind of social practices they recontextualise and how this is accomplished linguistically. The final stage in this kind of CDA analysis is to make sense of all the findings. What does it all add up to? What discourses can be reconstructed from the texts? These questions present a hermeneutic challenge. Take, for example, the observation that some MA/PhD students tend to suppress or background their own agency. The potential interpretative significance of this finding has to be carefully weighed against other recontextualisation choices and representational patterns in the data. To ensure sufficient academic rigour, due consideration has to be given to co-text/co-discourse, intertextuality/interdiscursivity, the context of situation and the overall socio-political and even historical context (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 93). The textual analysis itself, however, has to provide the empirical evidence: "hermeneutic interpretation requires detailed documentation" (Wodak & Meyer, 2009a, p. 22). Van Leeuwen's own work shows that accurate and documented conclusions can indeed be drawn using his socio-semantic framework.

3. Postgraduate students' recontextualisation of research

In this section, I would like to share some of my work-in-progress into "doing research" as a social practice. The claim is that when applied to the text and talk encountered in academic settings, and to research recontextualisation in particular, Van Leeuwen's socio-semantic CDA model may not only help discover core participants' *social cognitions* (Van Dijk, 2009, p. 78) but also misconceptions and misrepresentations. I will report, and put into perspective, some of the preliminary findings, and next, discuss potential implications for ALL practice. Insights and ideas are based on (ongoing) analysis of the convenience sample of postgraduates' questionnaire and interview data mentioned above (see Section 1.2).

3.1. Doing research, communicating research, satisfying requirements

Judging from the questionnaire data, novice researchers rarely draw a clear distinction between the practice of "doing research" and other, related academic practices. Consider the following extract:

Question 3: What have you already done so far?
> I'm almost done with data collection, I have 5 more stakeholders to meet + interview, writing proposal is almost done as well just need to fine tune the lit. review portion & intro. Need to really start writing the "real" thesis soon!

Question 4: And how satisfied are you with what you have done already?
> 30% because I haven't really started with the writing part just yet. [2507MMAO]

Though the questionnaires have "doing research" as their explicitly stated focus (see Appendix), many postgraduate students are like 2507MMAO in spontaneously co-recontextualising other academic practices: they not only mention collecting data but also writing the "real" thesis or writing the MA research proposal. In this way, 2507MMAO and others construct a single "research discourse" in which all of these become entangled. Preliminary findings show that these *intrusive* practices (my term) are of two kinds: "communicating research" (e.g. writing up part of the research or presenting the research at a faculty workshop) and what I will call "satisfying a requirement" of the programme. The latter practice refers to research-based requirements like submitting an MA research proposal or obtaining a PhD degree.

My research so far suggests that many MA/PhD students construct the social practice of "doing research" as being made up of *more* actions and *more* participants than those that are actually involved in it. To begin with the latter, it is researchers and their co-researchers and support staff that conduct research. Library assistants, laboratory technicians, colleagues and even

MA/PhD supervisors (see Section 2.3.1) do not qualify as participants in the same practice. As for the actions and micro-actions involved, reference can be made to the summary list in Section 2.3.2. However, presenting a conference paper or submitting a research proposal is not in that list; they are not constitutive of the "doing research" practice. In Van Leeuwen's terminology, these recontextualisations would qualify as *additions*. So, when asked about their research progress, the postgraduate students readily combine

> {A} doing research
>
> {B} communicating research
>
> {C} satisfying some requirement (e.g. submitting their proposal).

Consider the same extract as above, now with the analysis in terms of the social practices that the answers recontextualise (in curly brackets):

Question 3: What have you already done so far? {A}

> I'm almost done with data collection {A}, I have 5 more stakeholders to meet + interview {A}, writing proposal is almost done as well {C} just need to fine tune the lit. review portion & intro {C}. Need to really start writing the "real" thesis soon {B}!

Question 4: And how satisfied are you with what you have done already?

> 30% because I haven't really started with the writing part just yet {B}. [2507MMAO]

Though talked about all at the same time, each of these social practices, i.e. {A}, {B} and {C}, comes with unique sets of actions, key participants, performance modes, presentation styles, times, locations, resources (tools and materials) and their respective eligibility conditions (see Section 2.1). They may be dialectically and ecologically interrelated (e.g. the requirement in practice {C} can only be satisfied on the basis of {A} "doing research") but the *actors* and the *actions* involved are not isomorphic.

Evidence for this claim can first of all be found in the typical representations of the respective social actors: in {A} someone is a (novice) researcher, in {B} a (novice) writer (or a communicator), in {C} a student or candidate. Note that the alternative linguistic representations in {C} may be indexical of different discourses and underlying "ways of knowing". Though both are *functionalisations* (Van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 42), they are not associated with the same activities or discourses: a "student" is not a "candidate" even though a "student" in one form of discourse may be a "candidate" in another. While the former belongs to an *educational* discourse of attending school and studying a particular subject or field, the latter suggests an *institutional* context of applying for admission or submitting certain documents "in (partial) fulfilment of the requirements for a degree".

Second, analysis of the actions involved also supports the conclusion that the three academic practices should not be construed and/or represented as aspects of the same phenomenon: either one of them can be successfully performed without the others. For example, in the case of plagiarism or editing, one is doing {B} without {A}. Similarly, PhD non-completers have usually done (parts of) {A} without {B} or {C}.

3.2. Implications for ALL practice

The findings and insights reported in the preceding section have been particularly helpful in my ALL practice as a *supervisor*. Worldwide, there are concerns over PhD attrition rates, usually attributed to a complex set of mostly environmental factors (Lovitts, 2001). High attrition presents universities with the challenge of how to screen, supervise and retain high-achieving students (Miller, 2009). Yet, improving doctoral or Masters throughput is not only a matter of institutional policies (e.g. the structure and process of postgraduate education) or individual excellence and perseverance. My analysis of research recontextualisation discourses suggests that part of the problem may lie in the way in which participants (mis)represent the academic practice of "doing an MA/a PhD" and the resulting paradoxes and confusions concerning the

(sub)practices involved. In interactions and communications with postgraduate students, supervisors should make a clear distinction among these various practices. The idea is to make supervisees realise that different social regulations apply in each practice and that knowing this can be useful in handling the various challenges of "doing an MA/PhD" more efficiently. Consider the following extract:

Question 2: And how is it going? {A}

- I am so worried that because I haven't started writing the wit writing papers {B} to be submitted to ISI journals {C} in order to fulfill the university's requirement {C}.
- There are so many works {A, B, C, Others?} to be done!! [2406MPHD]

This reaction was recorded six months into the PhD process. It is my hypothesis that much of the worry has to be attributed to the student's inability to separate {A} from {B} and {C}. The extract given in Section 3.1 similarly shows that this inability may lead to unfavourable self-assessment: though the data collection is "almost done", the PhD student is only 30% satisfied because he/she has not started with the writing yet. Apparently, discursive entanglement allows lack of progress in one practice ({B}) to diminish postgraduate students' feelings of efficacy and successful performance in another ({A}). In supervising students like 2406MPHD and 2507MMAO, it could be advisable to introduce, therefore, a *discourse of empowerment*. Such a discourse would emphasise their agency as self-driven researchers ({A}) rather than their frequently negative self-perceptions as inadequate or reluctant writers ({B}) or "victims" of institutional policies and procedures (the requirement to publish in high-impact journals).

Van Leeuwen's work on discourse as recontextualised social practice has also helped me in my role as an *academic writing instructor*. My research shows that postgraduate students predominantly recontextualise the practice of "doing research" in terms of "communicating research", and mostly, "writing an essay/paper/thesis" ({B}) or "submitting an assignment" ({C}); their lexico-grammatical representations typically foreground writing or handing in an assignment (i.e. satisfying a requirement) at the expense of researching a particular problem. Insights into how academic and institutional (sub)practices become "muddled up" can help academic writing lecturers design learning activities that more narrowly focus on *each* of the relevant practices *separately*, for example: {A} carrying out individual research activities that require observation and note-taking while excluding other forms of language use, {B} presenting and writing up someone else's research findings (based on an interview with a peer researcher and his/her research questions, data and findings), and {C} research into, and group discussion of, the many uses of research other than knowledge production.

The main objective of the above suggested activities is to create awareness that much of the work expected of postgraduate students can in fact be broken down into distinctive, more manageable steps across different but related social practices. The assumption, as above, is that the clarity to be gained from doing so will translate into higher levels of self-efficacy. More research is needed to discover how linguistic representations, underlying discourses, social cognitions and actual behaviours affect each other, and how this knowledge can help improve ALL practice.

4. Concluding remarks

As the preceding exposition and examples have shown, Van Leeuwen's framework can provide the resources for a *systematic* textual analysis of *concrete* discursive events. As argued by Fairclough (2005), the main strength of Van Leeuwen's model lies in the high degree of precision with which it produces "descriptive accounts of selectivity (inclusion/exclusion, degrees of salience and backgrounding), relative concreteness and abstraction/generalisation, as well as such options as generic and specific reference" (p. 63). In addition, and to quote Walkó (2009), it "combines the 'neatness' of linguistic categories with the underlying 'messiness' of socio-semantic analysis" (p. 210). In Van Leeuwen's (2009) own words, it is "a clear tool" (p. 277), which may to some extent explain why his framework for recontextualisation analysis has been widely adopted within CDA.

Hopefully, this short paper has shown that it can also be fruitfully used to problematise and improve certain aspects of our ALL practice. Van Leeuwen is not only well suited to reconstruct the discourses (or social cognitions) from such texts as conference presentations, research grant applications and journal articles but also what novice researchers talk about when they talk – or rather, when they *think* they talk – about their research activities. It can also help ALL researchers identify potential processes of disempowerment or deception that get in the way of successful academic performance. It has not been my intention to provide an exhaustive analysis, let alone, a conclusive argument that such processes are at play. The corpus texts that I have examined so far (see Section 1.2) do suggest that research methodology primers, academic writing course books, handbooks for new academics, programme guides, interviews with PhD scholars and the like do not provide novice researchers with a complete or accurate picture of the *materiality* of "doing research". Preliminary findings show that the recontextualisations privilege general, *classificatory* and *collectivising* representations. These twin discursive processes then reconstruct the social practice of "doing research" in terms of a relatively abstract and objective goal-oriented activity whose limited resources (e.g. money and time) can be effectively and successfully managed.

Moreover, the discourses that many novice researchers themselves use do not offer a helpful alternative: they often display a lack of perceived control (the issue of agency raised in Section 2.3.1) and contain negative reactions associated with confusing the three practices of "doing research", "communicating research" and "satisfying a requirement". Features like these may suggest the existence of a discourse of *disempowerment*, i.e. a discourse in which the postgraduate students – most probably unwittingly – construct themselves as less powerful and purposive than they can be. If that is indeed the case, our ultimate aim should be to create a research discourse that enhances students' understanding of what it is they are supposed to be doing and that will promote independence and more successful processes and outcomes.

Acknowledgements

Appendix: "Structured interview" questionnaire

HOW ARE YOU GETTING ON WITH YOUR THESIS?

Please answer the following seven questions about work on your MA or PhD thesis, using the space provided. Please write legibly.

Present
  1. What are you doing right now?
  2. And how is it going?

Past
  3. What you have already done so far?
  4. And how satisfied are you with what you have done already?

Future
  5. What are you planning to do next?
  6. And what are your expectations about how it will go?

Problem and solution
  7. Report one problem that has hindered work on your thesis. And how did you solve it?

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