Disciplinary Identities: Individuality and Community in Academic Discourse

Ken Hyland.
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Disciplinary Identities is an intelligent blend of synthesis and innovation. With it, Ken Hyland coherently follows the trail of his previous work, in particular that of *Disciplinary Discourses* (2004), whose final chapters constitute his present point of departure, and of those articles explaining the tension between positioning (authorial stance and visibility) and "proximity" (the conformity and "engagement" with communal constraints and expectations) to take a broad view of academic identity through a constructivist approach.

Indeed the works on identity currently circulating are, as Hyland states in his preface, diverse and massively numerous, and therefore one must have powerful reasons for launching another book onto the market. *Disciplinary Identities,* suffice it to say, is not only justified but also welcome because of three very strong points: first, its conjugation of shared knowledge and new findings – the latter regarding hardly explored representational genres such as academic bios, theses acknowledgments, prize applications and academic homepages; second, its eclecticism, both theoretical and methodological, which enriches the current landscape of research into academic interpersonality and provides us with a versatile arsenal of tools; and third, an ample conceptual coverage leading to suggestive directions for further studies. Among them are the connection between identity and multimodality (the author's survey of academic webpages reminds us that identities are relational, multimodal and semiotic), the whys and wherefores of generic bending, issues of disciplinary and discursive appropriation and hybridization, the diachronic evolution of self- and group branding, the erosion of genres by individual style, or the variation of content and form across channels and media (oral, written, multimodal, traditional and digital) and throughout educational levels.

A comprehensive nine-chapter structure vertebrates the scope of this monograph deductively. From an initial description of the context in chapter 1 (that is, of the notion and dynamics of disciplinary cultures), the conceptual funnel progressively narrows down by specifying the object of study in chapter 2 (the interplay between proximity and positioning), the linguistic frameworks and methods of investigation available, which comprise Conversation, Narrative, Corpus and Critical Discourse Analysis (chapter 3), and by displaying a catalogue of understudied representational genres in chapter 4 (theses acknowledgments, prize applications and academic webpages). Academic bios, by contrast, have been separated from the former genres to elaborate on their thematic and encoding intricacies in chapter 5, while non-representational genres (or at least not so overtly representational) such as undergraduate reports, and others already extensively dealt with in *Disciplinary Discourses,* as is the case of research articles and book reviews, are reserved to illustrate features of authorial visibility in chapters 6-8. In them Hyland contemplates writer voice (even idiolects), and to do so he refines his perspectives on stance and engagement (basically gathered in his 2002, 2005 and 2010 articles), relating them to a constellation of factors that mediate communicative choices and consequently chisel identity: culture, discipline, genre, reputation, seniority, and gender.

Simply put, identity is a matter of what we really are and do, of what we think we are and do, and ultimately, Hyland argues, of how we express such thought. Identity is but the product of an ongoing negotiation that agglutinates three major opposing pairs across the mediating variables enumerated above: essentialism/dynamism, sameness/difference, and communality/individuality. We could add a fourth one, the tandem fears/desires (Lemke, 2008), which impels us to conquer a successful reputation so as to become full group members, and thus our bios speak of ourselves in terms of educational backgrounds, employment (mobility and institutional prestige), teaching experience (time and specialization), research publications (number and impact), roles (community services), and awards and achievements. Some of these imposed themes may be prioritized over others depending on the discipline and writer's emphasis, certainly permitting wide leeway for self-representation within word limits. However, a sort of tacit code of trans-academic politeness dictates that, out of modesty, tact, or shame – and whatever the field – there be, for example, no mention of average teaching evaluation results, and the same applies to regional and national teaching-quality rankings in university websites.

When John Swales and I knew we were going to review *Disciplinary Identities* for different journals, our immediate reaction was to dissect Hyland's discursive identity and test on him the "practice what you preach" adage. Swales highlighted his engagement with the reader through a clear prose and the inclusion of summaries at the end of each chapter, and also noticed his self-effaced use (in humble service of the discipline?) of first-person pronouns, very similar to that of his Hong Kong undergraduates, analysed in chapter 6. The direction of such mimesis remains a mystery to us (it seems eventually all things come round full circle), although Hyland's self-mentions increase considerably in the second half of the book.

Instead I have turned my gaze to his blurb bio and his liking for hyper-informative titles, which straight off from the table of contents help readers raise accurate expectations and contribute to the mnemonic function of the summaries and conclusions to come. Binary and triadic titles juxtaposing the chapters' keywords predominate, slightly outnumbering colon-organised ones that distinguish generalities from specificities and problems from methods at either side of the colon, whereas a couple of titles formulated as rhetorical questions arouse suspense and set in a dialogic tone. Concerning his blurb bios, the one here is a minimalist combination of employment and seniority, a profile common to his other solo-authored books and differing curiously from the quantification of experience and editorial fertility in the jackets of his edited volumes. Blurb bios are not infallibly written by authors/editors, but they do edit them and have the final word.

Another trait already inherent in Hyland's academic imprint is the recurrent and collectively-coined metaphor whereby we qualify him as a scholar: that of the "toolbox supplier". Inevitably, there are omissions in every work, and this metaphor leads me to comment on two aspects I have missed along my reading, one of them being precisely the methodological link with Cognitive Linguistics as a tool for the study of self- and community-created tropes, which are subtle signs of identity. The other is some discussion on the feeling of cultural "in-betweenness" and the sense of identity gained or lost through English as a *lingua franca*.

Above these minor gaps, *Disciplinary Identities* is, no doubt, a great book. On the one hand, it recapitulates the panoramas given by preceding ESP and EAP research through Corpus and Discourse Analysis and by a variety of areas ranging from Semiotics, Narratology, or Sociolinguistics within Applied Linguistics, to Sociology, Anthropology, Psychology and Philosophy

outside it. On the other, it travels further afield to discover and inspire fresh sites of identity. I cannot help re-metaphorizing Hyland as a skilful army sapper clearing the way and building bridges that enable us to cross safely to other shores, some apparently remote. After all, sappers carry sophisticated toolkits with them.

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