

Phraseology and epistemology in academic discourse: Constructing and evaluating written knowledge in History and English Literature

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In this talk I will present the interim findings of an ongoing corpus-based study of the relationship between phraseology (defined as preferred ways of saying) and epistemology (defined as preferred ways of knowing) in written academic discourse, with a particular focus on two humanities disciplines, History and English Literature.

The starting point for the analysis is provided by Becher and Trowler's (2001) oft-cited characterisation of humanities disciplines as being epistemologically "reiterative", "holistic", "concerned with particulars, qualities [and] complication", and as having "understanding" and "interpretation" as their primary goals. The aim of my study is to ask whether and to what extent it is possible to identify phraseological features that express these rather abstract epistemological values in written academic texts produced by professional historians and literary critics.

The empirical data for the study consist of research articles and book reviews from leading journals representing these two disciplines over a five year period from 2018 to 2022. The methodology of the study is inductive, and focuses on the identification of frequently-occurring constructions in each corpus as revealed by a detailed concordance analysis of statistical keywords belonging to the four main closed grammatical classes: conjunctions, determiners, prepositions and pronouns.

The results of my analysis suggest (a) that Becher and Trowler's characterisation of the 'soft/pure' epistemology of the humanities remains valid in general terms, and (b) that there are both similarities and differences in the phraseological profiles of the two disciplines studied here. More specifically, my analysis finds that constructions identified in the research articles corpora can be divided into three main epistemological groups, which I will refer to as *Complexifying* constructions, *Relational* constructions and *Interpretive* constructions respectively. My analysis also identifies a fourth group of constructions, *Evaluative* constructions, which are particularly prominent in my book reviews corpora. I will conclude with some reflections on the theoretical, methodological and pedagogic implications of my research.