



**Book Review: Zuczkowski, Andrzej, Ramona Bongelli, Ilaria Riccioni and Carla Canestrari (eds.) (2014). *Communicating Certainty and Uncertainty in Medical, Supportive and Scientific Context*. John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 413.**

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*Communicating Certainty and Uncertainty in Medical, Supportive and Scientific Context* is a volume that consists of a collection of eighteen papers. Sixteen of these papers were selected from all the papers presented at the International Conference “The Communication of Certainty and Uncertainty: Linguistic, Psychological, Philosophical Aspects”, organised by Andrzej Zuczkowski, Sibililla Cantarini and Anita Fetzer. It was held at the University of Macerata (Italy) from 3rd to the 5th of October 2012.

Most of the authors of these papers are graduated in some interrelated areas such as Linguistics, Psychology, Psycho-pedagogy, Translation and Interpreting, Philology and Education among others. This is why it is proved clearly that they have high qualifications in the main topic of this study as well as research experience. Moreover, most of them are professors or assistant professors at prestigious and well-known universities all over the world such as the Sapienza University of Rome (Italy), the University of Hannover (Germany), the University of Porto (Portugal) or the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle in Paris (France).

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This monograph provides the reader with a global overview about the way in which certainty and uncertainty are communicated and dealt with in a range of different precise contexts such as the medical, the supportive and the scientific context. All the papers that form this volume try to answer the question of how speakers and writers state and enunciate their own degrees of certainty or uncertainty when they deal with the information they should give hearers/readers in the process of communication. Different approaches from various perspectives are held by the authors along the different articles.

Nowadays, there is an increasing interest which is based on the study of Discourse Analysis in different knowledge areas, not only in humanities, but also in scientific areas as the reader will be able to check in this volume. This is why it is not a coincidence that this book was published in 2014. The compilation of these papers can be considered the result of several years of research related to this topic in different parts of the world. Although the main topic of this volume is based on certainty and uncertainty in the written and oral communication, it also shows an approach to these two opposed concepts, taking into account certain linguistic concepts such as modality, speech acts, objectivity, etc. Today, all these aspects are very relevant in a society in which the difference between what people say and what they want to say is very important, as well as the degrees of certainty or uncertainty that different messages can have in different situations, and the consequences that all these aspects can provoke. This is one of the main reasons for which the potential significance of this volume can be highlighted.

As the reader will have the opportunity to confirm, the style of this monograph is non-judgemental. It only tries to obtain truthful and sincere conclusions through real evidence. The main focuses of these essays are going to be found precisely on real evidence. Real situations of everyday lives are used by the researchers who not also check, but also analyse the concepts of certainty and uncertainty.

This compilation of papers is structured in three different parts. The first part consists of six papers, whereas the second and the third part consist of five and seven papers, respectively. The first part is more theoretical than the rest of the sections. It contains papers that present general models and theoretical breakthroughs. Certainty and uncertainty are the main focus of these papers, although their authors do not work with them in an isolated way. They complement and enrich their studies by adding other linguistic aspects to their investigations. Some of these linguistic aspects that have been checked in relation to certainty and uncertainty are speech acts, hedging, evidentially or modality among others.

On the other hand, the second part of this volume is much more practical than the first one. Although it takes into account different theoretical approaches based on other researchers' premises, it is composed by five papers that try to present results built from real situations. Because of this way of obtaining results, these studies should be considered empirical. Most of them took place between professional and patients in different medical interactions.

Finally, the third part of this book primarily aims at developing qualitative and quantitative studies, consisting of analysing corpora of scientific writings as well as English, German, Spanish and Romanian academic writings.

As the reader will observe, these three complementary parts ordered and presented in a very coherent way, make this book a really valuable book in the area of Conversational Discourse Analysis.

We now turn to analysing and describing each of the different papers a little more in detail. Jan Nuyts is the author of the first paper. His goal is to study the controversial issue of subjectivity vs. objectivity related to modality in interactions, in which an assessor and a group of people participate. An important aspect of this interaction has to do with possible common ground or not that can exist between the participants. At the end, Nuyts elaborates an alternative concept of (inter) subjectivity. The fact of elaborating an alternative concept of subjectivity is exceptional since the reader has the chance of observing how Nuyts tries to go a step further in this linguistic issue.

Whereas subjectivity is the main matter in the first paper, assertion is the main one in the second paper, by Paolo Labinaz and Marina Sbisà. Three different approaches to assertion are presented in this article. Both experts show the relationship of assertion with the key concepts of this volume: certainty and uncertainty. This theoretical study is applied to a corpus of Italian and English texts called 'Stamina Case'. It should be pointed out that the different approaches shown in relation to assertion in this paper makes it more enriching as it provides the reader with a deeper view of this concept.

The third paper shows a system called Realis. It is known to be a Reciprocal And Lifelong Interpretation System. Pragmatics and Semantics are combined in this system. The reader will enjoy this paper since he/she will be able to get to know this new system characterised by its innovative application.

Semantics is also analysed by Klaus Hölker in the fourth paper. The difference between knowledge and belief is considered the main discussion of this theoretical study. This essay results to be really interesting since future practical applications could be seen in the future.

Semantics continues being the concern of the fifth chapter. Meaning construction and the relations between cognition and communication are covered by Sebastian Fellers. Finally, the presentation of a new theoretical model is done in the sixth article. This innovative model has got three epistemic positions, which are knowing, unknowing and believing.

This first part of the book is full of theories, methods and discussions of concepts and aspects that are interrelated between themselves, and at the same time with the concept of certainty and uncertainty. Although everything is developed in a clear way, it is true that it can result not very dynamic to follow by the reader due to the big theoretical content of these chapters. This is why this part of the volume should be read, taking into account previously what kind of concepts will be found in it.

On the other hand, the second part of this volume may be found much more attractive by readers because it presents real situations and the reader is able to recognize certain patterns from their own experience.

The first paper of this part corresponds to the seventh chapter of the volume. Giolo Fele represents a corpus of telephone conversations from calls that are made to the Italian number of medical emergencies. In these cases, the reader can observe the real excerpts of the conversations. Fele deals with the problem of knowledge and the lack of it in relation to certainty and uncertainty. He points out how in most occasions the person that makes the phone call has got insufficient knowledge about what had happened or what the situation of the injured people is. In spite of this lack of knowledge, there is always a common goal in all of these calls. They need help and that is going to be their essential objective. The lack of knowledge and some of its effects are the main issues in this research. While asking for help is known to be the final objective of the seventh chapter, giving advice is the main goal of the eighth one. This paper focuses on the problem of uncertainty, which has been supposed to be a big problem over the years at the moment of giving advice by an expert. However, this research shows how it should not be considered such an anxious part of the relationship between the doctor and the patient, but just as a strategy and a rhetoric resource, which can be used by the experts.

Anna Franca Plastina and Fabrizia Del Vecchio continue with the interactions between doctors and patients. However, in this case bad news is the main focus. This analysis shows how doctors should work in order to reduce the semantic relevance towards the truth while dealing with patients who have prostate cancer. The bad impact of the news in the patient is reportedly softened by a protocol that is mentioned in this text called SPIKES. The reading

of this chapter shows the reader how efficient using this protocol can result in these difficult situations. Drug addicts are the main characters of the next chapter. Group meetings for this kind of people are the base of this research. In these meetings, the desire of the educators is to obtain information about the activities that these addicts do daily. Tensions and inconveniences can be observed in these conversations as well as a clever management of knowledge by both parts. The different strategies used by both parts are going to be analysed in this paper. Finally, this part concludes with a paper that emphasizes the study of the role of semiotic objects such as documents in the oral interactions between civil servants and migrants. This investigation shows that these objects play a very important role in the negotiation of knowledge.

This part of the volume is really interesting because different researchers show real situations that they have analysed, taking into account different aspects related to certainty and uncertainty. In this way, the reader can check all the steps that are followed towards the conclusions perfectly. The possibility that these papers offer to the reader about seeing the real transcriptions of the analysed situations, and the pictures related to the objects of the previous paper make readers feel absolutely involved in what they are being told. That is why it can be said that it is the most attractive part of the volume to the reader. In spite of it, as it deals with so many different cases in different areas, it is true that it lost part of the unit that other kinds of works offer to the reader.

Finally, the third part exposes an analysis of corpora, consisting of scientific writing and academic communications. Letizia Caronia chose the telephone surveys as her field of study. Her aim was to check how and to what extent uncertainty could be ignored in these situations and what their effects could be. Secondly, Oliver del Olmo analysed the use of hedging and attitude markers in Spanish and English medical writings. She observes how hedging is more used by Spanish scientists when they write in English than when they write in Spanish. In relation to this attitude, Oliver del Olmo checks how Spanish reviews are more optimistic and positive than English ones. The next chapter tries to show how scientific writings are not limited only to language devices, although they are very important. Moreover, the author emphasises a different level of modality, depending on the writer and if he/she is an English native speaker or not. In chapter fifteenth, uncertainty language is evaluated over a 167- year span of biomedical scientific articles by a historical corpus. In order to do it, general verbs, modal verbs, adverbs, adjectives and different kinds of expressions are analysed in detail. At the end, the results show how markers of possibility are preferred more than markers of subjectivity to communicate uncertainty. Continuing with the importance of uncertainty

markers, the next paper of this volume analyses this kind of markers in a corpus of sixty linguistic articles with the main aim of analysing how certainty and uncertainty can vary over time. This research considers different aspects such as the morphosyntactic and the lexical ones. However, the results showed that all the different aspects in relation to uncertainty markers such as their quantity do not suffer significant change over time. Elsa Pic and Grégory Furmaniak are the authors of the next chapter. They make an investigation about the use of certain *wh*- questions to question certainty. They base their study on research articles and popular science articles. A classification of different kinds of questions is made and it is studied how they affect the previous discourse in which they are found. Finally, the last chapter of this book studies the influence of self-repairs and certainty in Romanian academic meetings. Different degrees of certainty can be achieved thanks to the use of self-repairs in different ways such as deleting, inserting or replacing the original message. This research highlights the importance of self-repairs in natural interactions.

This third part of the volume can be also considered to be a practical part. The research papers that form this part base their investigations on a selection of written texts or oral interactions, which create accurate and precise corpora. The reader will be able to follow the qualitative and quantitative analysis that are done by the researchers.

To sum up, it can be claimed that this volume has a great value to all those investigators and professionals related to the field of Linguistics as well as to all those scholars or pre doctoral students who are being introduced into the world of investigation. As opposed to other works, the interest for this volume can be spread to other areas of knowledge, not only Linguistics, but also Psychology and even Philosophy since it deals with the relevant and current topic of Discourse Analysis, and it presents updated information in all the different sections as well as revised and accurate sources of information. Although it is true that the first part of this monograph is more theoretical than the rest of the parts and as a consequence, it can be more delimited to experts or highly qualified researchers; the second and third parts are much more practical. They explain the process of their study in a more empirical way, describing their initial hypothesis, the objectives, the followed methodology and finally the results of real communicative processes, taking into account the here and now of these written or oral situations. As this last part shows real situations with which the reader can feel identified, they become more interesting to the reader. Generally speaking, the reader can feel interested

and engaged with these situations as they are situations that the reader can recognize so that they feel a sense of involvement in them.

In addition to the previous idea, it can be said that this combination of research papers contributes to the studies of Discourse Analysis in a very good way. They offer different points of view about a big range of linguistic aspects that deal with the ambiguous controversy between certainty and uncertainty. As the volume consists of eighteen different studies, the academic professionals who have access to this volume can have the great chance of coping with a large list of aspects and discussion topics, from which they can learn. In addition to this, other significant aspect of this volume should be mentioned. The majority of the papers present further questions in their conclusions so they propose further fields of study, which can be considered to be very interesting. That is why this volume of papers can be also seen as a source of inspiration for researchers who are motivated and interested in developing new theories and lines of study in the field of Corpus Analysis.

It is difficult not to like the dynamism that the succession of these papers offers to the reader. It gives a sense of energy and action to the fact of reading as well as it can be appreciated the enthusiasm of a great group of researchers from all over the world. This reality is obviously a positive aspect of the book. However, a negative point could be related to this same fact since some readers could have the sense of reading a big number of papers without going deeper in any of them. On the other hand, it is true that the main objective of this monograph is to provide the reader with a deep knowledge about the topic of certainty and uncertainty in scientific communication and this goal will be highly achieved by every reader. No other weakness is presented in this volume as it is a great opportunity to come closer to the field of Discourse Analysis. What is more, this volume includes not only a very clear table of contents and a preface at the beginning, but also a really useful and convenient section about the authors at the end of the volume. This section includes practical academic information about the authors, the affiliation of each of them and the most valuable thing which is their personal emails. This fact will enable all the readers, who will have the desire to go deeper into these topics or even to collaborate in the further proposed studies, to get in touch with real experts in these subjects. This is why it can be concluded that this book offers a fantastic chance to get closer to Linguistics, to go deeper in it and even to take part into future lines of study. For all of the above, the reading of this volume brings new theoretical knowledge, while showing real and practical results and at the same time providing a source of inspiration for further research.

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Dr. **Estefanía Torrijos** has a degree in English Studies and also a Master Degree in English Didactics and Education. Nowadays, she is writing her PhD thesis in his home university, Complutense University in Madrid, activity that she combines with teaching. She works as a teacher of English in Secondary Education in a school in Madrid. Moreover, she teaches different courses aimed at taking Cambridge University exams. Her lines of research deal with different aspects related to English Linguistics.

## Book Review Article history

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