1 Introduction

> The notion of profession is dangerous because it has all appearances of false neutrality in its favor. Profession is a folk concept which has been uncritically smuggled into scientific language and which imports in it a whole social unconscious. It is the product of a historical work of construction and representation of a group which has slipped into the very science of this group. This is why this "concept" works so well, or too well: the category of profession refers to realities that are, in a sense, "too real" to be true, since it grasps at once a mental category and a social category, socially produced only by superseding or obliterating all kinds of differences and contradictions.
>
> (Bourdieu 1989: 37–8)

What does it mean to be a professional? What does a professional do to distinguish himself or herself from laypeople and other professionals? To many people, being a professional means having a degree from a medical school, many years of experience in an occupation or even just an affiliation with a particular organization or guild. A profession is much more than these. In order to understand how a professional undertakes duties and jobs in his or her daily routine, an interdisciplinary approach is inevitable and discourse analysis is well placed to do this because its assumption that discourse is mediated by different social contexts allows insights from different disciplines to be integrated into the analysis.

Professional discourse is the language used by professionals including lawyers, doctors and engineers. However, the term 'professional' should be extended to emerging professions, which are part of a phenomenon that Gee et al. (1996) call the 'new work order', whereby workers are empowered by regulatory forces once common only in traditional professions to increase their motivation and productivity. Besides this practical reason of motivation, the call for professionalism in any job is driven by two other important factors: the increasing need of specialization and the exercise of control through language. The modern workforce has been increasingly specialized and the traditional division of jobs may not be sufficient. There can be different types of specialization. Some are more focused on mechanical operations and others on manual or mental abilities

(Freidson 2001). Accordingly, the distribution of everyday, practical, formal and tacit knowledge will be different for each one. The division of jobs into different professions also serves the function of what Foucault calls the 'objectification' of subject. By objectifying people into categories or professions, they can be more easily controlled and manipulated from an institutional view.

In a narrow sense, 'professional discourse' refers to the language used by certain professionals, such as doctors and lawyers. In a broader sense, 'professionals' may include any individuals who have undergone some specialist training in the workplace. This may include teachers, marketers, sales executives, financial planners and so on. This broader view of professional discourse resonates with Gunnarsson et al.'s (1997) view of professional discourse as the language used by a diverse range of 'professional areas' or 'domains' such as legal, medical, social welfare, educational and scientific fields which are marked by 'a unique set of cognitive needs, social conditions and relationships with society at large' (5). This also underscores what Gotti (2003: 24) refers to as 'specialist discourse' which refers to 'the specialized use of language in contexts that are typical of a specialized community stretching across the academic, the professional, the technical and the occupational areas of knowledge and practice'. To a large extent, any profession or company represents a 'discourse system' (Scollon and Scollon 2001), which links members through a shared ideology, socialization, face systems and discourse forms. This book takes the broader view of 'professional' – that is, 'professional' may include any individuals who have undergone some specialist training or education before they are eligible to become members of certain professions.

What is professional discourse?

Professional discourse is the language produced by a professional with specialist training to get something done in the workplace. Some scholars hold that it involves only communication between a writer and reader who are both professionals. Others maintain that at least one of the participants has to be a professional. For example, Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson (1999) argue that one of the defining characteristics of professional discourse is status dimension, in which one has a professional role and hence a higher status than a layperson, which is the reason why professional discourse usually takes place in an institution. The broadest notion of professional discourse is provided by Linell (1998), who argues that professional discourse can be divided into three categories:

(1) intraprofessional discourse, or discourse within a specific profession, such as communication among academics;

(2) interprofessional discourse, or discourse between individuals from or representatives of different professions, such as communication between medical doctors and pharmaceutical sales persons, or between accountants and engineers; and
(3) professional–-lay discourse, such as communication between lawyers and their clients, or between advertisers and their potential customers.

Added to these categories is regulatory professional discourse, which is used to regulate or control a profession: for example, the codes of practice issued by a hospital to doctors and nurses. Regulatory professional discourse, usually taking an occluded form, should belong to the categories of intraprofessional or interprofessional discourse. Certainly, regulatory discourse can be written by peers or professionals of other categories but there is a very significant difference compared with other kinds of communication, mainly in that regulatory discourse has a very strong normative function in shaping and forming the profession in question. Another important dimension that should be added to conceptualizing of professional discourse is the interactional or affective function of language in professional contexts, where interpersonal negotiation of meaning is always at stake in addition to exchange of information. Lastly, the language used by professionals plays an important role in socializing their professional roles and identities, as many have argued that professional discourse is a 'licensed belonging' to a profession (Candlin 1997: xi–xii) or a 'banner of identity' (Wenger 1998). As pointed out by Mertz (2007: 3), 'a lawyer thinks like a lawyer because one speaks, writes and reads like a lawyer'. Learning how to communicate like other professionals is always the first step of getting into a profession. This is especially the case in professions that heavily rely on communication, such as the law and public relations.

In brief, professional discourse can be defined as any semiotic forms – spoken, written or visual – constituted by and constitutive of social and domain-specific contexts, and used by professionals with special training in order to achieve transactional and interactional, as well as socialization and normative, functions. As an interdependent system relating to ideology and social relationship, professional discourse can be oriented among professional peers and different professionals, be targeted to laymen or be used as a regulatory force to control the practice of professionals themselves. This definition will be explained in detail in Chapter 2. Analysis of professional discourse has been deeply entrenched in the traditions of the teaching of English for specific purposes in Britain and the European continent and the teaching of composition or rhetoric in the United States. This pedagogical focus has shifted attention away from the central issues of power and domination to the more practical values of use or functions. While there is nothing wrong with this functional approach to professional discourse, there are many issues that have been intensely raised in other cognate approaches (e.g., Critical Discourse Analysis) but remain unanswered or even unexplored in the analysis of professional discourse. This is surprising because most of our time is spent in the workplace. There are several theoretical assumptions that have to be spelt out before we move on, such as social constructionism and social practice, socialization and identity, and indexicality, reflexivity and performativity.

Social constructionism and social practice

The language used by any profession is the product of culturally, historically and ideologically driven generalizations and classifications which tend to stereotype individuals and solutions to problems (Rojek et al. 1988). From the perspective of social constructionism, discourse, including even scientific discourse, is highly selective and socially constitutive, and is defined as:

> a set of meanings, metaphors, representations, images, stories, statements and so on that in some way together produce a particular version of events… Surrounding any one object, event, person etc., there may be a variety of different discourses, each with a different story to tell about the world, a different way of representing it to the world. (Burr 1995: 48)

This definition of discourse is echoed by Gee, who defines 'Discourse' with a capital D and refers to 'ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes, and social identities' (1996: 127). Any artifacts are hence constructed out of certain cultural, historical and ideological contexts and cannot be assumed to be natural or context-free. In a similar vein, discourse has been regarded as a form of social practice in which users of any discourse are not aware of their own actions in an interaction. They behave the way they do just because it is the way of being and acting in that particular situation. For example, classes have been conducted in the traditional format of Initiation–Response–Follow-up, which means it is always the teachers who initiate questions, topics and so on, and it is always the students who respond to them, leading to the follow-up acts of the teachers. Teachers and students cooperatively construct this social practice every day without tacit knowledge or overt awareness of the pattern but it is this very pattern that leads to a particular classroom reality and consequently the unequal power distribution between teacher and student.

Although this book is titled *Professional Discourse*, it may be more appropriate to retitle it as *Professional Written Discourse* owing to its dominant focus on the written manifestations of professional discourse. Nevertheless, written texts are no less interactional than spoken discourse. As argued by Rafoth and Rubin (1988), written text is a form of social constructionism because (1) writers construct mental representations of the social contexts such as audience and power difference during the writing act; (2) writing as a social process can articulate or constitute social contexts; (3) a text may be a collaborative effort of a group of people; and (4) writers assign 'consensual values' to writing, thereby constructing a particular dimension of social meaning. As regards the reading of a written document, there is also social interaction going on because a reader has to invoke a text first and negotiate with the reader in the ways appropriate to an action, very similar to what happens in a face-to-face interaction. For example, the way I approach a medical case report as an analyst is different from a doctor-in-charge of the ward who has to read it, underscoring what Smith (2005) identifies as the text–-reader conversation: first, a reader has to activate a text and becomes an active agent of the text; second, the reader has to respond to it in any ways relevant to his or her work. In the field of professions, written texts are regarded as 'coordinating subjectivities' (Smith 2005) and play a very important role in constructing social organization in different locations at different times, as she argues:

> The capacity to coordinate people's doings translocally depends on the ability of text, as a material thing, to turn up in identical form wherever the reader, hearer, or watcher may be in her or his bodily being ... It is the constancy of the text that provides for standardization ... technologies of print made possible or enabled historically an organization of social relations independent of local time, place, and person. Texts suture modes of social action organized extralocally to the local actualities of our necessarily embodied lives. Text–-reader conversations are embedded in and organize local settings of work. (166)

In other words, written texts should be regarded as a social action or social practice that happens at a particular time when the writing is created. It is activated again when a reader reads it and responds to it in an appropriate way, possibly leaving a long gap between production and reception. This is exactly the power and weakness of writing. It can be stored as a permanent record for a long time but it is subject to individual use and interpretation, although some texts are more prescriptive than others. For example, legal ordinances provide more coercive power to conform than possibilities for creativity and individual negotiation. On the other hand, advertisements provide more freedom of not conforming and of improvising according to one's needs and contexts. This point is neglected in many scholarships of written discourse analysis that assume a fixed reception and influence of a text regardless of the text nature and social contexts in which they are invoked as active.

Discourse, socialization and identity

Discourse plays an important role in professional socialization, which is 'the process by which individuals acquire specialized knowledge, skills, attitudes, norms, and interests needed to perform their professional roles acceptably' (Eden 1987). Discourse is important here for at least two reasons. First, the professional attributes or frames are acquired mainly though discourse or through what Wenger (1998) identifies as 'mutual engagement' (such as interaction) and 'shared repertoire' (such as a shared set of written discourse) in a community of practice, which is basically a collection of social practices (shared repertoires) developed out of interactions (mutual engagement) pursing a common goal (joint enterprise). From this perspective, written discourse as a form of shared repertoire is at risk of being reduced to simply the products of mutual engagement and joint enterprise. However, even though practice may not reside in the structure of shared repertoires, they do not happen in a historical vacuum and always have historical traces of the interactions that generate and make them possible (Wenger 1998: 73). For example, codes of ethics are both the products of interactions among professionals and the yardstick by which they measure their behaviour against each other. Another reason for the importance of discourse in professional socialization is that the competence of a professional largely rests upon his or her ability to use the specialist language required of him or her in a particular situation. In other words, the language used by a professional has an important bearing on the professional identities he or she is claiming. A mismatch between an identity claim and the language used is one of the obstacles that novice professionals have to overcome in this process of secondary socialization.

Some research has been done on this process but most of it focuses on spoken interactions and very little has been done on the specific role of written texts in socialization of different professions. McClean's (2010) recent study is one exception and argues, by comparing letters of advice by law students and professional lawyers, that the formation of a professional lawyer's identity is a dynamic accommodation of contradictory and incompatible voices, achieved by 'concealing the tensions by foregrounding one position and allowing others to retreat to the background' (192). On the other hand, contradictions 'between academic and professional roles, between a dynamic and a synoptic perspective, between a partial and an impartial perspective, and between abstraction and specificity' are manifest in texts written by law students as novices (192). In the same vein, Dressen-Hammouda (2008) argues that mastery of symbolic genres (e.g., professional frames and visions) reflected in the use of different textual strategies distinguishes field reports written by novice and expert geologists. More studies of this kind are required in order to identify the textual strategies of established and novice professionals, and hence to compare the ideological contradictions of different professions which can become more explicit when one looks at novice texts whose writers are struggling between contradictions and conflicts inherent in their professions. A cross-professional comparison of textual socialization is also important to identify the more universal strategies of socialization. This issue is especially important because of our concurrent multiple memberships, some of which cut across our professional, institutional and personal communities. As Ochs (2001) argues, 'we have tended to overemphasize the unique communicative configurations of particular communities and underspecify over-arching, possibly universal, communicative and socializing practices that facilitate socialization into multiple communities and lifeworlds' (228). Having said this, not all language practices are empowering. On the other hand, some language practices can be developed during socialization to inculcate conditions that inhibit certain practices, highlighting the conflicting nature of discourse: both enabling and constraining. For example, Mertz (2007) identifies the so-called Socratic method in US legal training, marked by 'extended questioning of a single student about a case assigned for that particular day, frequent interruption, few (if any) answers provided, an insistence on close attention to the language of the cases, a challenging, if not hostile, tone' (44). Simulating the trial situation dominated by a judge, this method is successful in orienting future lawyers to their focus on form, authority and legal-linguistic contexts, which is nevertheless done at the expense of losing insights about the content, morality and social contexts. As Mertz argues, this approach can 'ensure the same treatment for everyone, regardless of the specifics of their situations', but at the same time it 'obscures very real social differences that are pertinent to making just decisions' (5).

Attributes and frames inherent in a profession are part of the identity a professional is claiming to have, and the language used by professionals has an indispensable role to play in creating and indexing those professional attributes and frames. Language use specific to a profession and the identity a professional claims to have creates a mutual and inseparable relationship. The reason why a professional speaks and writes in certain ways is because he or she carries or is developing a legitimate identity which is projected in his or her discourse. In other words, language use frames and indexes one's professional identity, determining how one perceives, interprets and behaves, which can be seen as a part of a social practice itself, denoting the unconscious role of identity in shaping language use. This close connection between identity and social practice is highlighted by Wenger (1998):

> There is a profound connection between identity and practice. Developing a practice requires the formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants. As a consequence, practice entails the negotiation of ways of being a person in that context. (149)

In other words, 'identity and practice mirror each other' (Sachs 2003: 126). Seen from another angle, a professional identity can be consciously or strategically constructed through discourse by an expert or novice member, although the degree of this consciousness is debatable. Nevertheless, it is under this consensus of close relationship between language use and professional identity that recent research has highlighted the importance of identity in developing communicative competence in different professional disciplines, such as academia (Ivanic 1998; Matsuda and Tardy 2007), healthcare (Schryer and Spoel 2005) and geology (Dressen-Hammouda 2008).

Indexicality, reflexivity and performativity

Professional discourse, as a social practice, is underscored by notions of 'indexicality', 'inflexivity' and 'performativity', all of which are fairly well established in the literature of linguistic and cultural anthropology (Agha 2006; Duranti 1997; Hanks 1996). These concepts have only recently appeared in the applied discourse analysis. Indexicality refers to the provoking or pointing of language to various contextual variables and vice versa. The 'reflexive' relationship between language and context should be highlighted because in some branches of discourse analysis, such as pragmatics, context plays an active part in the production and interpretation without acknowledging the role of language users in shaping contexts concurrently. This is the reason why 'context' should be replaced by 'contextualization', meaning that context is not a static phenomenon but a dynamic process of interaction between context and language users. Some contextual dimensions are 'brought about' (e.g., body language and contextualization cues or indexical markers of contexts) that shape context actively in producing and interpreting an utterance. Although the contextualization cues or indexicality markers can range from intonation change or word choice to rhetorical structure of a whole text, they are important signals of contextual meaning that people rely on during interaction. On the other hand, some contextual factors are 'brought along' (e.g., the relative status of participants), meaning that they are more fixed and relatively more difficult to negotiate (Gumperz 1992). The second, more theoretical, concern is reflexivity. There are two meanings of reflexivity. The first one refers to the linguistic utterances themselves and the other meaning refers to the wider web of social practices in which utterances are embedded. At the level of utterances, language can be used to structure, organize and classify language itself: as Agha (2006) maintains, linguistic signs can be used to typify other linguistic signs. Sense-making devices, as discoursal tools to bridge discourse meanings, are an example of linguistic reflexivity and will be dealt with in detail in Chapter 6. At the level of social practice, reflexivity refers to the unconscious action of language users to respond to the social environment, diluting the importance of individual agency in social action. For example, the mixing of genre conventions in professional discourse is not regarded as a conscious effort of language users but a reflexive action to respond to the needs and immediate contexts. This reflexive response is underscored by the notion of performativity (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Butler 1990), referring to the production of our social and cultural identities through creative use of contextual and interactional resources. According to performativity, the pre-discursive self is downplayed, highlighting the idea that the self is constructed in an on-going fashion.

Some characteristics of professional discourse

Let us now consider what makes professional discourse unique by referring to the following two letters.

Letter 1

> Dear Sirs,
>
> What would you do if you were in our position? Although we have contacted your office on several occasions to request that you bring your balance with Intertec up to date, we have yet to receive your payment or your reply. The balance now due for advertising in our Cellular/Mobile Int'l totals £240.

Source: Vergaro (1998: 113)

Letter 2

> My dear Sarah,
>
> Even though I have lost loved ones, I can't begin to imagine the black cloud of loneliness hovering over your heart right now. John's death is going to take a long time to sink into my mind. It will take even longer, I know, to sink into yours. His death was so sudden, so completely unexpected.
>
> I will miss him always, but you will miss him even more . . . You have my heart.
>
> My love,

Source: Heatherley (1996: 74)

The first letter is a business letter written by an institution or someone representing the institution in the hope that the money due will be paid as soon as possible. The second letter is written by someone to a friend who has just lost someone loved. Obviously, the two letters have a very different tone, audience and intent, but what can be said about the difference between these two letters other than that the first is more formal and the second more informal?

If we take the analysis a bit further, then we can say that the first letter belongs to the cline of professional discourse whereas the second one belongs to lay or private discourse. Professional discourse is characterized as follows.

> *Professional discourse is based on the knowledge, beliefs and assumptions that are acquired through some form of specialist training or socialization*

Although professional workers receive training, formal and/or informal, their job performance also requires the use of previously acquired knowledge or skills. Professional training can vary from a few months, in the case of clerical officers, to a few years, in the case of medical doctors, and includes the acquisition of professional language. Professional discourse is usually based on some learned repertoires, but does not necessarily use technical terms or complex sentence structure, although some types, such as legal discourse, are (notoriously) associated with difficult words and sentence structure. Whether technical language is needed depends very much on the audience and the nature of what is being communicated. Take Letter 1 as an example: it concerns a customer's overdue account. The language does not need to be technical. The most important message to get across is that the customer owes the company money and must pay the amount outstanding as soon as possible. Nevertheless, not anyone could write this letter; it is crafted with due preparation and prior knowledge. How does the writer know that the person owes money, or the exact amount of the overdue payment? He or she may need to find this information in a complicated accounts system. In other words, the output may not contain jargon or reflect technical knowledge, but the production of the discourse relies upon skills and knowledge specific to a profession – in this case, accounting. It would be very tedious for the accounts receivable officer to write, 'After a careful search of the accounts records in my computer, I have found that your account has an outstanding balance of . . .' This knowledge is somehow assumed or implied in the text. The writing of Letter 2, in contrast, does not require any special training either prior to or at the time of its creation.

Although technical knowledge may not be explicitly demonstrated to the audience through the use of jargon, technical lexis is an indicator of professional discourse in many settings, because it is the clearest manifestation of someone's knowledge. In other words, to demonstrate to an audience that you know something, you must be able to label it. Gotti (2008) identifies the salient lexical characteristics of professional discourse, which include monoreferentiality and precision. As the major goal of professional discourse is to communicate what needs to be done, efficiency is a great priority. Words with a double meaning in context, which are