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**Christine Versluis. Why this now? A genre analytic approach to aphasic / non-aphasic interactive events**

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Christine Versluis (2017). *Why this now? A genre analytic approach to aphasic / non-aphasic interactive events*. 296 pages. ISBN: 978-94-6093-232-8.

Aphasia, a language impairment due to brain damage, affects approximately 1 in 250 people. Since language is the most important tool for social participation, aphasia dramatically disrupts everyday life (Code & Herrmann, 2003). An evaluation of the impact of 75 diseases and conditions revealed that aphasia has the largest negative effect on quality of life, followed by cancer and Alzheimer's disease (Lam & Wodchis, 2010). Versluis' work on communicative potential in interactions involving people with aphasia (PWA) therefore not only contributes to the existing literature on discourse in aphasia, but also addresses an important clinical question. Even though over two centuries worth of aphasia research has led to extensive psycholinguistic models and flow charts of language processing and its obstructions relative to symptoms of aphasia, researchers and speech-language pathologists still have little knowledge of what it actually comprises to have aphasia. They know what it is like to talk to someone with aphasia, but do not have more than evidence-based assumptions about what it is like to have aphasia. Versluis argues that to non-brain-damaged (NBD) speakers not only aphasia itself but also the verbal strategies that PWA use, are unfamiliar, which threatens the already limited communicative potential of interactions involving PWA.

This innovative point of departure and Versluis' clear passion and enthusiasm when it comes to stressing the importance of understanding possible differences in expectations of the scope of interactions between PWA and NBD speakers made me excited to read and review the book. I appreciate the call for attention for the effects on social identity and redefinition of roles and relations of PWA and their NBD communication partners. One of the first things I noticed when I went through the book, and specifically the table of contents, is that it has a clear structure. Particularly Chapters 4, 5, and 6 are built up consistently and hence help the reader understand the order and different levels of analysis. Something that struck me was that Versluis refers to PWA as 'aphasics' versus 'non-aphasics' to refer to NBD speakers. Not only is it common practice to use people-first language in aphasia research, but especially considering the fact that the study "is designed to advance awareness of the aphasic (sic) participants' perspective on discourse with aphasia" (p. 13) these terms do not sit comfortably.

In Chapter 1, the twofold aim of the study is introduced. First, Versluis aims to explore the assumption that the communicative potential of limited linguistic structures used in interactive events that comprise a PWA and a NBD speaker may not well be appreciated because the participants of such events may have different perspectives on the knowledge and actions associated with these. Second, she aims to present an interesting case for genre theory as proposed by Steen (2011).

In Chapter 2 Versluis introduces genre theory, claiming that it "is essentially designed as an analytical framework for accurate research into discourse events" (p. 15). She explains how interaction can be seen as "an event in which participants basically solve a coordination problem" (p. 18). This problem is caused at the discourse participants' individual (as opposed to the shared) mental model. To achieve goals in a genre event, such as a conversation, participants alternately fore- and background conventional shared and individual mental models, depending on what they are pursuing, which in turn depends on what is valuable to them. Versluis explains that "a genre analysis defines how participants deal with a particular genre in a given instance, how they explore and utilize it to their benefit, using linguistic and other coordination devices to signal to each other their perspective on the assumedly shared ground" (p. 20). Furthermore, in this chapter Versluis discusses aphasia and its characteristics

that are of relevance for the topic under study. She explains why she uses a functional perspective on agrammatism, starting from the assumption that agrammatic structures represent strategic behaviour in PWA, reflecting a dispose of costly linguistic elements in favour of elements with high information value, and hence a focus on balancing communicative goals and processing costs. She argues that even people with severe non-fluent aphasia can be engaging storytellers who are capable of projecting basic macrostructure and applying evaluative tools, but that referential clarity, cohesion, and coherence are affected by reduced linguistic resources, requiring a relatively more active role for the non-brain-damaged conversation partner. The literature discussion is exhaustive and woven through the whole dissertation. Apart from some ill-formed sentences the book reads well and contains good 'flow'. The references in the text contain some errors, and the bibliography contains both errors and omissions, making it complicated to look up the resources.

In Chapter 3 Versluis provides a demonstration of her analytical perspective. The status of this chapter was initially unclear to me, as it does not contain a traditional description of the research methods but demonstration analyses instead. The data analysed in this chapter are similar to the data analysed in the other chapters in that they represent interviews concerning rehabilitation, yet different because the interviewees do not have linguistic impairments. From the following chapters and the Discussion chapter it became clear that Chapter 3 allows for better interpretation of the case studies involving PWA.

Chapters 4-6 present the actual case studies involving PWA. The analyses consist of discussions of *context*, *text*, and *code*. The analyses go hand in hand with a discussion of relevant literature, and takes an innovative approach to among other things the well-known "overprotection-dilemma": Should the PWA be helped and protected, or should s/he struggle independently? (e.g., Croteau & Le Dorze, 2006). The analyses provide interesting insights into how diverging projections on context, text and code can affect interactions. For example, Versluis demonstrates how a specific interview environment may be perceived differently by the interviewer and the interviewee, and how participant symmetry can be promoted by not sharply controlling formal participant roles. I appreciate the awareness that is generated for the potential roles of such characteristics, and the exhaustive analyses of the materials. At the same time, I find it difficult to tease apart Versluis' multitude of roles, and hence consider the findings as results of analyses of unbiased materials. Knowing that Versluis was the interviewer in two of the three case studies, utterances like "I interpret the interviewer's effort as ...", "which may indicate that the interviewer considers ..." or "I conclude that the interviewer expects ..." reinforce this sense. Finally, given the intrinsic subjective component of the scientific process of interpretative analysis I would be curious to read to what extent a second analyst would obtain similar findings.

In Chapter 7 Versluis discusses the findings of the three case studies. She suggests that in the examined cases the PWA and the NBD participants do not have coordinated minds in respect of the prominence of aphasia in the genre model they project. Versluis infers that the NBD participants in the examined events value simplification, and that if the roles were reversed they would focus on what they might be able to convey rather than what was on their mind. PWA on the other hand did not adjust their message to assumed limited available resources by reducing the complexity of what they intended to convey. NBD participants thus showed a more conservative approach to interaction involving PWA than the PWA.

In sum, Versluis showed that the approach proposed by Steen (2011) is a useful theory to gain comprehensive insights into different levels of genre (i.e., context, text, code). Versluis'

analyses are exhaustive and well-integrated in previous literature that is of relevance for analysis and understanding of genre. In my opinion the dataset used for the research has a number of limitations. The research would have been stronger if the dataset were larger and better mutually comparable. The study represents the genre analysis of only three individual cases, which were drawn from two different resources: two interviews were collected by Versluis herself, and the other one by a colleague. This seems somewhat problematic since whereas Versluis had not met her interviewees prior to the interviews, the other interviewer already knew her interviewee well at the time of the interview, and had already discussed the interview topics with him before. The fact that Versluis acted as both the interviewer and the analyst may be problematic, too. Rather than a neutral, independent interviewer, she was a participating researcher with certain hypotheses, expectations and research goals. Even though she initially did not seek to address her research question using this specific genre theory approach, at the time of data collection her research question was “essentially similar” (p. 52) to the current one. Especially given the topic of the research this may have affected the interactions.

Versluis’ dissertation addresses a topic that is of both scientific and practical relevance, and leads to an important message: take PWA’s linguistic choices seriously, and do not let the condition of aphasia pose limits on the types and forms of stories than can be told.

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