Communicative Functions of Code Glosses in Students’ Handbook from a Ghanaian University

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Abstract - In recent times, metadiscoursal devices are increasingly being studied by researchers in Applied Linguistics, Discourse Analysis and English for Academic and Specific Purposes because of their indispensable role in all forms of communication. Unfortunately, code glosses, one of the metadiscoursal devices, have not received much attention in metadiscoursal studies. To fill this gap, the present study draws on Hyland’s model of code glosses to explore the use of code glosses in the Students’ Handbook of University of Cape Coast. Qualitative content analysis was employed in analysing the data set. The analysis of the text revealed that code glosses helped clarify a proposition by defining, exemplifying, reformulating and simplifying it. The findings have implications for the theory of metadiscourse, in general, and code glosses, in particular and institutional communication/discourse.

Keywords - Code Gloss; Hyland’s Model; Students’ Handbook; Metadiscourse; Reformulation

1. INTRODUCTION

Metadiscourse encompasses linguistic resources that are used to organise propositional information, or demonstrate a writers’ attitude towards either their message or readers (Hyland, 2005). It presupposes communication as a social engagement which seeks to establish triangular relationship among text, writer and reader (Hyland, 2005; Adel, 2006). Writers, therefore, draw on extant linguistic resources at their disposal to realize interactivity in discourse (spoken and written). Hyland (2005) refers to the metadiscoursal resources used by writers to manage information flow in order to communicate their preferred interpretations to their audience as interactive resources. The interactive resources comprise code glosses, frame markers, transitions, evidential and endorphoric markers. Given that almost every text is written to be understood (Hyland, 2005), writers employ code glosses to elaborate ideational or propositional messages or information. Code glosses have been explored in a number of genres such as thesis, sermons and discoursal contexts like academics, politics and religion (e.g. Hyland, 2006; Yoshii, 2006; Taylor, 2006, 2013; Jacob 1994; Fahimipour & Hashemian, 2013). All the above mentioned works, except Hyland (2006), focus on listening and reading comprehension. Such studies have sought to find out the effects of code glosses on readers’ comprehension of written and spoken texts.

The only detailed study on code glosses in text linguistics is probably Hyland (2006). Hyland’s (2006) study used data from master’s and doctoral theses. He found that code glosses performed two broad communicative functions, which are reformulation and exemplification. The present study is similar to Hyland’s (2006) study because it also seeks to find out the communicative functions of code glosses in written text. However, the generic contexts are different. The present study is situated within the ‘handbook genre’ while Hyland’s study was within the thesis genre. Hence, this study, specifically, seeks to explore the communicative functions of code glosses in University of Cape Coast Students’ Handbook (UCCSH).

1.1 Conceptualizing Code Glosses

Encarta Dictionary (2009) provides four related important definitions of gloss:

1. a short definition, explanation, or translation of a word or phrase that may be unfamiliar to the reader, often located in a margin or collected in an appendix or glossary
2. an interpretation or explanation of something
3. to give a short definition, explanation, or translation of a word or phrase that may be unfamiliar to the reader
4. to interpret or explain something in a deliberately misleading or negative way

In the four preceding definitions, Encarta Dictionary (2009) underscores the general role of gloss as an elaboration to a technical or a specialized word. Some words are perceived to be specialized or technicalised because a generic or institutional, socio-cultural context can confer an extra meaning to the generally or universally known meaning of a word.

The first definition from the Encarta Dictionary alludes to the location/placement of glosses in texts. Wikipedia therefore implicitly enumerates three kinds of glosses, based upon their location: interlinear (in-text), glossary, and footnote/endnote glosses. The last two types consider gloss as an appendix or a ‘secondary discourse’ to the main text (‘primary discourse’) (Vande Kopple, 1985).

The fourth definition is the preserve of Opinion Mining,
which is a sub-discipline of computational linguistics (Read Esuli & Sebastiani, 2006).

In this study, gloss is limited to the inter-linear type, which is labelled as code glosses in metadiscourse literature. This sense of gloss considers it as an integral part of the text, which helps to increase interactivity and interpersonality in text. Code glosses was first used in the metadiscourse literature by Vande Kopple (1985). He classified metadiscourse elements into two main categories—textual and interpersonal metadiscourse. He classified code gloss as one of the four subcategories under the textual metadiscourse.

Vande Kopple’s (1985) terminology has been adopted by almost all subsequent scholars (Crismore et al, 1993; Hyland, 2005; Adel, 2006) who helped popularise metadiscourse to make it more theoretically grounded and empirically explicit (Hyland, 2005). Even though there are divergences in the metadiscourse theories, code glosses appear to be one of the subcategories of metadiscourse whose definition and function are accepted by all the theorists on metadiscourse. Code glosses signal reformulation, restatement, or exemplification of ideational message (Hyland, 2005). Adel (2006: 165) appropriately refers to it as ‘metalinguistic operation of clarification’.

Writers are always aware of the register of the discourse communities within which they draw their member resources (Gee, 1999). As such, they authenticate their ‘nativity’ in the discourse community by using the accepted phraseology and conventionalized lexicon. They also bear in mind the wider readership of their texts. Hence, by using the technical terms of the discourse community to demonstrate their socialization or enculturation, they also adopt linguistic and rhetorical resources to elaborate the ideational content in the handbook to ensure that the readers obtain full understanding of its contents.

To achieve communicative success, the University adopts linguistic and rhetorical resources to elaborate the ideational content in the handbook to ensure that the responsibility of understanding the content lies on the handbook writers (UCC), not the readers (students). This is anchored on the notion that English is a writer-responsible language (Hinds, 1987), as earlier indicated.

2.2 Data Analysis Procedure

The corpora were analysed in four stages. In the first stage, all instances of code glosses were identified in the text. I read through the text three times at different times. This was to ensure that all code glosses in the text were identified. The second stage focused on the classification of the code glosses into their communicative functions. Here, I used green, black, blue and red pens to mark reformulating, defining, exemplifying and simplifying communicative functions respectively.

The third stage included the transformation of the qualitative data into quantitative form for quantitative analysis. The statistical figures brought out the text styles given that ‘style can only be isolated by examining typical choices [code glosses choices], and therefore frequencies’ (Short, 1996: 330).

The mixed method was useful in analyzing metadiscourse items because ‘quantitative analyses give a solid empirical foundation to the findings while the non-quantitative analyses are required for interpretation’ (Biber, 1988: 52). Biber (1988) further adds that quantitative and qualitative approaches are complementary, and that one is incomplete without the other. More so, the mixed method is employed as a strategy of triangulation to ‘bring greater plausibility to the interpretation of results’ and also ‘to increase the validity of the eventual findings’ (Hyland, 2000:195). Regarding quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics was employed for the identification of trends and patterns in the frequency of code glosses in the handbook. Descriptive statistics was utilized since it renders ‘data into forms which facilitate the comparison of disparate kinds of information’ (Nwadingwue, 2002: 82).

The final stage involved issues on reliability. Ten pages of the text were given to two Senior Research Assistants from Department of English, University of Cape Coast to identify code glosses. The inter rater percentages revealed 97% and 98%. The high inter-coder percentages is attributed to the in-depth knowledge of the inter-raters on metadiscourse, particularly code glosses.

2.3 Institutional Context for the Research

Institutional and disciplinary contexts influence discourses that writers produce. Lilli and Curry (2010) maintain that the geopolitical contexts of writers inevitably influence text production at both the discoursal and metadiscoursal levels. Consequently, Fuertes-Olivera, Velasco-Sacristan, Arribas-Bano and Samaniego-Fernandez (2002) argue that
metadiscourse, particularly code glosses use, is influenced by setting and genre.

The geopolitical setting of the present study is Ghana, a multilingual West African country. Kachru’s (1992) classifies Ghana as part of the outer circle, where English is used as a second language. The English Language is, therefore, used as both official language and academic lingua franca in all educational Ghanaian institutions. Institutional communication is also done in English.

Ghana has eight public universities, which are University of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, University of Cape Coast, University of Education, University of Development Studies, University of Mines and Technology, University of Allied Sciences and University of Renewable Energy. The institutional context for the present study is University of Cape Coast (UCC), the third public university to be established in Ghana (Dwarko & Kwarteng, 2003). The University was first established in 1962 as a University College of Education and affiliated to the University of Ghana, the premier university of Ghana. Its main aim was to train graduate teachers for Ghana’s second cycle institutions, teacher training colleges (now Colleges of Education), technical institutions and polytechnics. UCC became a fully-fledged university with the mandate of awarding its own degrees, diplomas and certificates in 1971.

UCC now comprises four faculties, viz., Arts, Social Sciences, Law, and Education; and five schools – Agriculture, Biological Science, Business, Physical Sciences and Medicine. Currently, UCC offers multidisciplinary programmes on full-time, part-time and distance bases, with the aim of training professionals who will help address the developmental problems of a changing world (UCC, 2010).

Two reasons accounted for the choice of UCC as the institutional context for this study. First, no study of this kind has been conducted in this University. I, therefore, considered it appropriate to undertake this study in this university to fill this gap. Coupled with this is the researcher’s affiliation to the university, which facilitated the access to the data.

3. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper offers a thorough discussion on the communicative functions of code glosses in UCCSH. Table 1 below provides statistical information on the use of code glosses in the students’ handbook.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functions</th>
<th>Frequencies</th>
<th>Percentages (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reformulating</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>61.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>18.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplifying</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>13.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simplifying</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of the communicative functions of code glosses in the corpus. It is shown that reformulation function of code gloss is the most frequent communicative function, recording 61.61%, followed by defining, exemplifying and simplifying communicative functions, in that order. The preponderance of reformulation markers reveals the University’s desire to make information accessible to students in a language that is relatively familiar. In the subsequent section, I provide qualitative analysis of the textual data.

3.1 Reformulating Function

According to Hyland (2007: 269), ‘reformulation is a discourse function whereby the second unit is a restatement or elaboration of the first in different words, to present it from a different point of view and to reinforce the message.’ Cuenca (2003) adds that reformulation is an alternative way of stating what has been said already. In the Handbook, reformulation was signalled by using punctuation marks or lexical elements. Two punctuation marks – slash and parenthesis – were employed by the writers of the handbook. These are exemplified in extracts 1 and 2 respectively.

1. The Library comprises the Main Library, Faculty/School and Departmental Libraries, and the Bindery and Printing Press

2. Misconduct of Junior Members (Students)

In extract 1, the slash (/) is used as a reformulation marker (Hyland, 2007) between ‘faculty’ and ‘school’. In this context, ‘school’ and ‘faculty’ are seen to have synonymous relation between them. This is used to inform students that faculties like Arts, Social Sciences, Law and Education; and schools like Medical Sciences and Biological Sciences have the same administrative institutionalised powers and authorities. On the other hand, in extract two, the parenthesis {( )} is employed as reformulation marker. This implies that ‘junior members’ and ‘students’ in UCC parlance are synonymous.

Furthermore, lexical resources were also used as reformulation markers in the UCC Students’ Handbook. Surprisingly, the only lexical element employed was ‘or’. The excerpt below demonstrates how ‘or’ is used as a reformulation marker:

3. Permission for a Club or Association to go on an excursion or education tour should be sought from the Dean of Students through the Heads of Department or patron and should contain the list of all those making the trip.

In example three above, ‘or’ is used as a reformulation marker between ‘club’ and ‘association’; ‘excursion’ and ‘education tour’; and finally, ‘Heads of Department’ and ‘patron’. The word ‘or’ establishes a synonymous relation between the pairs. Hence, contextually, ‘club’ and ‘association’ have the same semantic implication, likewise ‘excursion and education tour’; and ‘Heads of Department and patron’.

Generally, the reformulation strategy is probably employed to remind students of an-already-provided information.
is therefore an alternative way to re-state what has already been said. Probably, it may be likened to repetition in literature which is mostly employed for emphasis. Also, re-echoing information reveals the seriousness the communicator attaches to the information.

**Defining Function**

Defining is an act of indicating the meaning of a linguistic or non-linguistic element. It can be described as an operation by which an expression is expanded to reveal its meaning. It is an important discourse act in academic writing as words and concepts have technical or technicalised meanings within their generic or disciplinary context. Definitions, therefore, make meanings clear and definite. Yoshii (2006) refers to glosses which perform defining functions as “gloss for definition”.

In the handbook, there were a total of seventy-four (74) definitions, representing approximately 18%. The rhetorical/linguistic resources employed in defining can be termed as definition markers. Definition markers were signalled in the students’ handbook by both linguistic and punctuational resources. Definitions are demonstrated by the extracts below:

4. *The University of Cape Coast is a community of Students, Lecturers and Administrators.*

5. *Sexual harassment can be considered as a continuum from unwanted sexual advances to rape.*

Definition, as we know, results in a clarification of language. Consequently, it contributes to text readability, thereby increasing readers’ comprehension of texts. Definition, as a code glossing function, helps ‘reduce the possibility of pragmatic ambiguity’ (Hyland, 2006: 287). This therefore has implication for the institution and the reader as well. It prevents any act of multiple interpretations that may give students the opportunity to flout university regulations, by hiding behind the vagueness of terms. Also, it makes a genuine representation of the university in the case of the interpretation of the text. Hence, readers do not need to consult an ‘ordinary’ dictionary to find the meaning of a UCC localized term or concept since an ‘in-text glossary’ is already provided.

A definition has ‘two main parts’ (Hurley, 2012) and a ‘minor part’ (Barnbrook, 2002), which he (Barnbrook) calls the ‘hinge’. The two main parts are the definiendum and the definiens. The former refers to what is being defined, while the latter refers to what is doing the defining. In example 4, the verb to be (is) is the hinge, while ‘The University of Cape Coast’ and ‘a community of Students, Lecturers and Administrators’ are the definiendum and definiens respectively. In extracts 4 and 5, we see two different structural types of definition markers—simple and complex. Extract 4 has ‘is’ as its hinge while 5 has ‘can be considered as’. These reveal the complexity and simplicity of the structure of hinges. Moreover, punctuation was also used as definition markers in the text. The only punctuation mark used is ‘dash’. This occurred five times in the handbook. The extracts below exemplify the use of dash as a definition marker.

6. *Sexual Imposition – non-consensual sexual touching*

7. *It is important to note that sexual harassment offences may be:
   - Non-verbal – offensive literature or pictures, graffiti, wolf whistle, mode of dressing.*

In the extracts above the dash has a semantic implication ‘refers to’. We can therefore replace the dash in extract as ‘Sexual imposition – (refers to) non sexual touching. So the dash has a semantic implication. The use of the dash was probably to economise space.

**Exemplifying Function**

Exemplification is a communicative strategy whereby examples are given to make something clearer or convincing. This implies that exemplification is a persuasive strategy. Hyland (2007: 270) refers to it as ‘communication process through which meaning is clarified or supported by a second unit which illustrates the first by citing an example. In the text, this was signalled by, what Hyland (2006) refers to as, exemplificatory markers. The exemplificatory markers were punctuational and lexical resources. Below are extracts from the text:


9. *No student would be eligible to stand in any election in the University (SRC, JCR, and Local NUGS).*

10. *The Hospital Board shall be responsible to the Academic Board for the formulation of policy for the efficient administration of the University including the execution of contracts for the maintenance of medical and sanitary services on campus.*

11. *The cadet corps shall not be used for unauthorized purposes such as demonstrations, strikes, and other unauthorized gatherings.*

12. *Counselling services are available for students on personal and social issues like:-*

   - *Phobia (fears) of any type (e.g. fear of examination, fear to interact with people, fear to speak in class).*

The lexical exemplificatory markers used in the text were ‘comprises’, ‘such as’, and ‘e.g.’ These were employed to provide typical examples of the term already mentioned on the left hand side of the structure. Exemplificatory markers are always the medial operators between what can be referred to as the ‘exampler’ (what is being exemplified) and the examples respectively. For instance, in extract 6, ‘unauthorized purposes’ is the exampler while ‘demonstrations, strikes, and other unauthorized gatherings’ is the example. Additionally, parentheses were used as hinges between the exampler and its examples. This is demonstrated by extract 9 above where the parenthesis has the semantic implication of ‘for example’ or ‘for instance’. The examples *(SRC, JCR, and Local NUGS)* in the parenthesis are examples of
university (UCC) elections. The parenthesis in the extract is different from the one in extract 12, which has a syntactic rather than semantic implication.

**Simplifying Function**

Simplification is a communication strategy of making something less complicated. It makes what has been said already easy to understand, and also remember. In the present text, simplification was signalled by acronyms and mathematical figures (both put in parentheses). These can be referred to as ‘simplificatory marker’. The quantitative analysis in Table 1 revealed that simplification recorded the lowest percentage (6.36%). The two simplificatory markers used were acronyms and numbers. Acronyms, as Rubinstein (2000) explains, are words formed from the initials letters of a name or phrase or combination of parts of a series of words, which can be pronounced as a single word. However, in this study, acronym is used as a broader term for abbreviations and initialisms. Below are examples of acronyms from the students’ handbook.

13. *Arts and Social Sciences Education (DASSE)*
14. *Vocational and Technical Education (VOTECH)*
15. *Junior Common Room Committee (JCRC)*

Although most students on campus are likely to be familiar with the acronyms, they may not know their full meanings. For instance, in extract 3, ‘JCRC’ is more familiar to students than its expanded form, ‘Junior Common Room Committee’. Therefore having such simplificatory markers in the students’ handbook increases students’ comprehension level and rate of absorption.

On the other hand, simplificatory markers were realized in the form of Arabic numbers. The numerals used were all Arabic ones because they appear to be commonplace in Ghanaian written discourse and so students are more familiar with them than the other numbering systems such as the Roman numerals. The extracts below exemplify how they were employed in the data set.

16. Students organizing trips outside the University must submit the names of all students going on such trips to the Dean of students and their Hall Warden/Master at least 72 hours (3-days) (emboldened in the original text) before they depart from campus.

17. All students on such trips should seek and obtain permission from their Heads of Departments seven (7) days before the trip.

In excerpt 17, the figure ‘7’ which has been parenthesized is the simplified form of the word ‘seven’. The handbook writers probably adopted the numbers as code glosses because they can probably emboss easily on the minds of the students, who are the main audience of the text.

4. **OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

The researcher observed some instances of a ‘misuse’ of simplificatory markers, particularly, acronyms. One, there was an instance where acronyms were used but were not expanded anywhere in the text. Those identified were ‘TEWU’, ‘FUSSAG’, ‘NUGS’ and ‘ID card’. The last one is justifiable because the general discourse community recognizes this usage and therefore takes for granted that everybody knows that ID card ‘refers to ‘identification card’. The problem here, however, concerns the first three acronyms. The absence of the meanings results in miscommunication. Hence, students probably guessed the meanings of these acronyms. It is therefore likely to create ambiguity since to some of the students some of the acronyms may mean something different in another context where they are familiar with.

Furthermore, another abuse was when an acronym was used but its meaning appeared later in the text. An example of this was ‘SRC’ and ‘JCRC’, which appeared in page 22 but their respective meanings ‘Students’ Representative Council and ‘Junior Common Room Committee’ appeared on page 45. This also creates miscommunication and ambiguity because acronyms may have different interpretations from different people. The difficulty here is how the ‘fresh’ students would be able to march ‘SRC’ to its meaning ‘Student Representative Council’. It is possible that some readers of the text may think that both concepts are different but not related in terms of a ‘token’ and ‘value’, as articulated by Halliday (1994).

More so, there was an instance where an acronym was wrongly placed before what may be called its ‘token’. Instances were ‘Director of University Health Services (UCC)’, ‘Coordinator, Audio Visual Aid (UCC)’. As they stand now, the parenthesized ‘UCC’ appears to have two possible communicative imports. One could mean ‘of’, so Director of University Health Service ‘of’ UCC. Another could also mean that UCC is an acronym for what appears before it. In each of the interpretations is justified. This suggests that the usage is ambiguous and therefore hinders comprehension of the text.

In view of the above errors of omission and commission associated with the use of acronyms as code glosses, the advice of Jennifer (2012) is deemed very useful: ‘...in order to avoid confusion for your reader, you must find ways to define the acronyms that you use. This is important because acronyms can have multiple meanings’ (para 2).

This paper has explored code glosses in University of Cape Coast students’ handbook. It was found that code glosses performed four main communicative functions which were defining, reformulating, exemplifying and simplifying. These have effects on the students understanding of the ideational content of the handbook.

It would, therefore, be interesting for other researchers to explore other metadiscoursal resources used in UCC students’ handbook. Further, one can also undertake a similar study on students’ handbooks from other university and compare the findings with this study. An inter-university study of code gloss in students’ handbook would always be an inspiring study.

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