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Book Review: Maria Załęska, "Retorica della Lingusitica: Scienza, Struttura, Scrittura"

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Book Review: Maria Załęska, *Retorica della Linguistica: Scienza, Struttura, Scrittura*

“The talent of writing consists in the creation of a context for other people to think and reflect”, concludes Maria Załęska in her present study of academic discourse in Italian. The book shows us how academic texts manage to create argumentative space for reflection on ideas. The model that the Author presents – ITMeDARC – is an innovative model which consists of seven methodological stages for academic writing in research: *Introduction, Theory, Data, Analysis, Refutation, and Conclusion*. With regard to the best known model IMRAD, which is based on methods used in experimental disciplines, the ITMeDARC model is adapted deliberately for research using empirical and observational methodology, especially for research in linguistics.

The purpose of the ITMeDARC is not only theoretical and descriptive. It is also practical, with heuristic features. Let us take the Method section as an example. Załęska highlights the Author’s freedom in the construction of this section, reminding us that it is even possible not to include a section on methodology at all. In this case, the author tells us implicitly that – when dealing with a specific subject in investigation – she/he is guided by her/his own way of thinking, rather than by available methodological standards. The ITMeDARC model is therefore in the first place a tool for self-reflection: before tackling the actual work of writing, the researcher can reflect on this model and try to design sequences that fit her/his research most.

Załęska’s study investigates a corpus of about 130 tests in linguistics, analyzing the writing practices of the discursive genre ‘*article*’ (appropriately compared with ‘*essay*’, i.e. *saggio*, when it becomes necessary) and combining the tools of rhetoric with those from genre analysis. Through the lens of current studies on communicative genres, the book reconsiders various elements of classic rhetoric, for example: the *genera dicendi* (*genus iudicale*, *genus demonstrativum*, and *genus deliberativum*) are regarded as autonomous and at the same time interdependent; the *inventio* and the *dispositio*, two out of the five stages in creating methodically a persuasive text which are postulated in the Aristotelian rhetoric (the other three

stages are *elocutio*, *memoria*, and *actio*); the *ordo naturalis* and the *ordo artificialis*, sequences which outline the external *dispositio* of a persuasive text. Making wise use of her rhetorical and linguistic knowledge, Maria Załęska moves forward from the macrostructure of the parts (Introductory, Technical, and Executive) to the sections (Introduction, Theory, Methods, Data, Analysis, Refutation, and Conclusion), and to the minor structures: the moves and their variations.

The model proposed here is a significant extension to our knowledge about academic communication. First of all, the study investigates features of disciplines which are often directed by data observation and interpretation, rather than experimental methodology. It is of particular significance that it deals with linguistics itself, which paradoxically seems to be often overlooked in literature. Furthermore, the importance of the model proposed lies in its double function: on the one hand, it is a heuristic resource for researchers, which can foster the development of an autonomous research style; on the other hand, combining apparatus from rhetorical studies and genre analysis, it provides teachers with didactic materials which help students to develop competence in generating intelligible argumentation in the *academic paper* genre. One aspect that the review wants to put some emphasis on is that, with its rhetorical approach, the book is also an insightful tool for teaching Italian as L2 writing.

The importance of rhetorical knowledge to composition has already been illustrated by numerous scholars (e.g., Knoblauch and Brannon 1984). Within Rhetoric and Composition studies, a “genre turn” is witnessed by the growing number of research on genre theory to be applied to composition (Bawarshi and Reiff 2010: 6). Genre-based instruction is seen as an advantageous tool in teaching L2 writing: it is *explicit*, *systematic*, *needs-based*, *supportive*, *empowering*, *critical*, and *consciousness raising* (Hyland 2004: 10-16), enabling teachers to better understand how language patterns are used to produce coherent and purposeful composition.

However, in the field of L2 writing, the composition task is still regarded by many teachers as language practice rather than written expression (Ferris 2003: 22). Under these circumstances students may be induced to focus on the lexicogrammatical aspects in the process of L2 writing, at the cost of being distracted from reflecting on the rhetorical functions and the communicating purpose, which are more important in accomplishing a logical and comprehensible prose. Adequate rhetoric training can certainly be useful in improving teaching L2 writing.

Despite the abundant rhetoric studies of academic genres, few of them are produced in the Italian language and targeted to Italian speakers or learners of Italian as L2. The majority of L2-related literature is on teaching / learning English as Second Language, with ELF (English as a lingua franca) becoming a trendy concept. Nevertheless, with the growing demand of improving socio-cultural or

business interactions among different cultures, the necessity of knowledge about a wider range of languages should not be overlooked, as language is universally recognized as the ensemble of cultural manifestations. The Italian language as a vehicle for its fascinating cultural and intellectual production is becoming an increasingly attractive target for L2 teaching / learning (Vedovelli 2001). As an illustration, in China already 17 universities offer bachelor's degree in Italian language and culture, of which seven have opened also the master's course. The book is a unique work in providing Italian teachers with rhetorical insights into the academic genres.

In conclusion, the implications are numerous and the argumentations are well-founded and well exemplified: readers will appreciate the theoretical and methodological implications of the analysis, the clear link with close analysis of discursive forms and communicative practices, the ways in which textual analysis illuminates the discursive procedures that constitute the research process itself.

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