

Editors' Preface

*Marianne Grove Ditlevsen & Peter Kastberg,
School of Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University*

In the global knowledge economy, societal wealth does no longer primarily stem from manipulating material, but primarily from processing, refining, optimizing and customizing knowledge. But knowledge growth at the rate and of the dimensions needed to assure the existence of a knowledge society implies that “knowledge asymmetries” tend to emerge at a rate corresponding to the growth rate of knowledge. The existence of such knowledge asymmetries is *per se* not a new phenomenon. As early as 1945 Vannevar Bush stated: “There is a growing mountain of research. But there is increased evidence that we are being bogged down today as specialization extends”. Generally speaking, knowledge asymmetries have probably always been a by-product of specialization in general and education and training specifically. Knowledge asymmetries, however, are not limited to the prototypical ones between social classes, between institutionalized social roles such as ‘expert’ and ‘layman’ or political institutions of power such as ‘authority’ and ‘subject’. Increasingly they also emerge within institutions themselves, between ‘experts’ from different fields, and increasingly ‘experts’ with different agendas or of different persuasion – political or otherwise. Traditionally such knowledge asymmetries would be seen as an obstacle to an ideal of unhindered knowledge flow. Knowledge asymmetries would thus be seen as an indicator that the knowledge potential of society is not synthesized and exploited as well as it (ideally) could have been. If they are indeed a hindrance, then – to a knowledge society – knowledge asymmetries are not merely one among many issues, they are probably *the* issue. This, in turn, implies that the predominant challenge of the knowledge society is – and will continue to be – how to transform ever more specialized knowledge into interactions in order for that knowledge to gain value outside of itself (this argument is developed further in Kastberg 2007). This is exactly where this thematic section of *Fachsprache – International Journal of Specialized Communication* sets in.

The five articles in this thematic section all stem from the 3rd international conference in the 360° Conference series at the Aarhus School of Business, Aarhus University (now Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University) in May 2010, organized by the Research Group for Knowledge Communication. In this conference, knowledge asymmetries were explored from three main perspectives: communication, representation and construction. (On these three perspectives of knowledge communication, see Ditlevsen *forthc.*) From a communication perspective, the conference explored communicative events in which knowledge asymmetries manifested themselves as well as the influence of knowledge asymmetries on communicative action. From the point of view of representation, the conference investigated how and to which extent knowledge asymmetries are represented in texts, and which strands of texts, genres, or discourses seem to favor the development, the maintenance, or the deconstruction of knowledge asymmetries. Last but not least, knowledge asymmetries were analyzed from the viewpoint of construction (or learning). Here the focal points were discussions as to the measurability of knowledge asymmetries as well as to which features and parameters could be said to have an impact on whether or not knowledge asymmetries were overcome (or not). As will become evident for the reader when reading the five articles appearing in this thematic section, each article draws on these perspectives in different ways, each shedding a unique light

on the phenomenon of knowledge asymmetries. The multiple perspectives not only expand our understanding of what knowledge asymmetry is; the multiple perspectives are themselves also a convincing testimony to the fact that knowledge asymmetry is both a valid and highly interesting field of research for the LSP community.

The first article in the thematic section is **Peter Kastberg's** "Knowledge Asymmetries – Beyond "To Have and Have not". From the viewpoints of asymmetry, knowledge and communication, Peter Kastberg (re)conceptualizes our understanding of what a knowledge asymmetry is. Based on this (re)conceptualization the article proposes a (re)evaluation of knowledge asymmetries beyond the proverbial "have and have not" perspective. The article thus lays the foundation for a novel and potentially very productive research perspective for Knowledge Communication and LSP alike. The article ends by addressing pertinent research questions emerging from the re(conceptualization) and (re)evaluation of knowledge asymmetries. In their article, "The Paradox of Scientific Expertise: A Perspectivist Approach to Knowledge Asymmetries," **Hugo F. Alrøe** and **Egon Noe** focus their attention on the fact that the growth of knowledge in modern societies necessarily leads to fragmentation of knowledge and thus to knowledge asymmetries of various kinds. The article gives a theoretical account of the perspectival nature of all scientific knowledge and uses this insight to reinterpret cross-disciplinary knowledge asymmetries. The article ends by suggesting a general framework for working across disciplinary perspectives in science and for using different kinds of scientific expertise in society. The third article in the thematic section is "An Extended Model of Knowledge Communication: The Situational View of Dealing with Asymmetries" by **Hanna Risku**, **Eva Mayr**, **Florian Windhager** and **Michael Smuc**. Here the authors investigate some of the far-reaching consequences of knowledge asymmetries in highly complex, real-life professional communication environments. The article focuses on describing and discussing various knowledge asymmetries between professional communicators, e. g. translators and visual information designers, and non-professional parties involved in text production processes. Derived from the scenarios discussed, the authors are able to propose a model for knowledge communication in which transactivity is stressed. In their article "Wissensasymmetrien, Interaktionsrollen und die Frage der ‚gemeinsamen‘ Sprache in der interdisziplinären Projektkommunikation", **Nina Janich** and **Ekaterina Zakharova** deal with knowledge asymmetries in interdisciplinary project communication and seek to answer the question of which impact knowledge asymmetries have among project participants from a communicative point of view. The study, which is part of the DFG¹ project "Die diskursive Aushandlung von Transdisziplinarität. Projektkommunikation im Spannungsfeld von transdisziplinärem Anspruch und disziplinären Rahmenbedingungen", is based on interviews with the entire group of participants in a research project in which researchers from the political sciences and physics work together. In their article "Climate Change Discourse: Scientific Claims in a Policy Setting", **Kjersti Fløttum** and **Trine Dahl** are concerned with the text as a result of knowledge asymmetries and analyze the nature of knowledge claims and the use of polyphonic constructions in IPCC's Summary for Policymakers of the Fourth Assessment's Synthesis Report (2007). This is done in order to show how climate change discourse may be characterized and interpreted by linguistic and discursive features from both scientific and political discourse. •

Notes

- ¹ DFG (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) is the central, self-governing research funding organization in Germany.

References

- Bush, Vannevar (1945): "As we may think." *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1945. 10.10.2011
<<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1945/07/as-we-may-think/3881/>>.
- Ditlevsen, Marianne Grove (forthc.): "Towards a methodological framework for knowledge communication." *(Re-)Conceptualising LSP Research: Methods and Aims*. Eds. Margrethe Petersen/Jan Engberg. Bern: Lang
- Kastberg, Peter (2007): "Knowledge Communication – The Emergence of a Third Order Discipline". *Kommunikation in Bewegung – Multimedialer und multilingualer Wissenstransfer in der Experten-Laien-Kommunikation*. Bern: Lang: 7–24.