

From bureaucrats to the public on the internet. Methodological aspects of intertextual analysis

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Abstract Decisions made by authorities form sections of intertextual chains that run from the preparation phase of an issue until the public is informed, and further when the public starts to discuss it (see Fairclough 1992). The chain consists of many types of texts with different communicative purposes. A concept that can be used to describe what happens within an intertextual chain is recontextualization. Linell (1998: 144–145) defines that as ‘the dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context to another’. When certain contents, facts or arguments are recontextualized, transformations of meaning tend to happen, depending on the contexts into which they are embedded. In specialized communication it is especially important to understand the nature of such transformations when the context changes. The present paper discusses the methodological challenges in studying transformations of meaning in intertextual chains representing specialized communication, especially when considering the internet as a medium. The most important challenges include limiting the material, identifying points of recontextualization within a chain, and defining the scope of the analysis. As methods and aims are closely intertwined, the paper also suggests potential research questions for research on specialized communication.

Keywords intertextual chain, specialized communication, recontextualization, administrative discourse, methods, internet

1 Introduction

An intertextual chain consists of series of texts that are linked together and transformed in regular and reoccurring processes of communication (see Fairclough 2003: 130). Therefore, such a chain is a combination of texts where each text brings in elements from one or several other texts in the same chain. An example of an intertextual chain where specialized communication is involved is formed by texts needed when passing a law; when a government proposal is transformed into legislation and the public is informed about the decision (see Klein 1991).

From a specialized communication research point of view, intertextual chains are interesting because they tend to cover *intraprofessional* (within specific professions), *interprofessional* (between different professions at workplaces) and *professional-lay discourse* (from professionals to lay people) (see Linell 1998: 143). For example, the process of changing a tax law includes intraprofessional communication during the preparation phase, interprofessional communication during the enforcement and professional-lay communication when the public is informed. When one phase turns into another, recontextualization takes place and transformations of meaning tend to happen.

Within the field of LSP (Language for Specific Purposes) research, studies of intertextual chains can be located within the research of textual and discursive features of specialized communication. Such studies are more about specialized *communication* than about special *language* (see Schröder 1991). Research into intertextual chains involving professional discourse has been carried out in Nordic countries by, amongst others, Solin (2001, 2004), Kjaer (2008),

Byrman (2009) and Koskela (2009b). For research in German see e.g. Klein (1991), Jakobs (1999), Adamzik (2002), Girth (2002) and Janich (2009). Solin deals with environmental discourse, Janich with economic discourse, and Jakobs with scientific discourse. Kjaer, Byrman, Klein and Girth have been working with legal and political discourse, and Koskela with administrative discourse, which covers the discourse involved in changing a law and informing the citizens about it.

However, much of the work on intertextual chains has been carried out on texts that do not represent specialized communication and do not relate to professional discourse in any particular way. The focus has been mainly directed towards media texts. Examples of such work are Forstorp's (1998) study of the media coverage of the Estonia ferry catastrophe, and more recently Tardy's (2009) research on the media-debate of language policy in the US, as well as Erjavec and Kovacic's (2009) article on the genre chain of what they call *mobi news*, that is the use of mobile telephone cameras in participatory journalism, to mention just a few. Most of these studies are based on the ideas of critical discourse analysis as presented by Fairclough (see e.g. 1992).

This paper considers the methodological challenges encountered when studying intertextual chains representing specialized communication. A particular focus is on the challenges with the material and challenges with the scope of research. The challenges discussed are derived from experiences of studying intertextual chains concerning changes in the tax laws of Finland and Sweden (see Koskela 2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Koskela/Vik-Tuovinen 2009a, 2009b). The questions addressed include problems with choosing relevant material, identifying points of interest within a chain as well as defining the scope of analysis, in the sense of finding the ideal unit of analysis. As methods and aims are closely intertwined, the paper also suggests potential research questions for research of specialized communication. However, the main focus will be on the choice of material, and especially on the internet, as the source of research material in administrative issues.

2 Concepts and definitions

Intertextuality can be defined broadly as the presence of traces of other 'texts' within a text (Fairclough 2003: 218-219). The related term *interdiscursivity* is used when discourse conventions and making use of different discursive practices are the focus. Nevertheless, in this paper *interdiscursivity* will not be discussed because the research this article is based on concentrates on textual analysis of *intertextual chains* within a field of specialized communication and not, at least so far, on how certain social domains permeate others. However, interdiscursivity offers interesting options for further research as it can be used to highlight the time-bound nature of human communication.

In earlier research on intertextuality (e.g. Swales 1991; Bazerman 1994; Devitt 2000; Tardy 2009), the terms *genre system*, *genre set*, *genre cluster* and *genre repertoire* were used. All these terms cover networks of texts that are related to each other in some way, and they have all been used in order to understand how texts work together for various communicative purposes. When compared with the other concepts, the term *intertextual chain* describes a more limited series of texts, which is well suited when studying administrative discourse, where one text tends to follow another according to a strictly predefined process (cf. Klein 1991). Many of the other terms are descriptions of a set of more loosely linked texts within some field. In addition, the methodological interest of this article in studying intertextual chains within specialized

communication is rooted in the analysis of the intertextual features, especially in *transformations of meaning*, as happens within the intertextual chains when the 'same issues' are dealt with in different contexts and for different communicative purposes. The other key aspect of methodological interest is in how the texts are linked to each other, and not in describing the texts or genres involved as communicative events.

In the study of intertextual chains, the concept of *recontextualization* proves itself useful and relevant. Linell (1998) even argues that recontextualization can be assigned a wide applicability and a fundamental position in the theory of communication. He (1998: 143-144) defines it as: "The dynamic transfer-and-transformation of something from one discourse/text-in-context to another". Most importantly, the concept makes it possible to follow what kinds of transformations of meaning take place as contexts change. In other words, it facilitates a process-oriented understanding of language use.

As stated above, *intertextual chains* provide a fruitful area of study for the research of specialized communication because they make it possible for a researcher to follow how meanings and their linguistic expressions change over time as they proceed through communicative processes. They make it possible to look at intertextuality at close range. This is especially interesting in specialized communication because the instances of discourse are seldom separate from others, but are rather, as Linell (1998: 149) puts it "links in chains of communication situations in which the same issue is recurrently reconstructed, reformulated and recontextualized". Looking at the recurring patterns of intertextual relations in intertextual chains can reveal interesting aspects of social structuring of professional discourse. Alternatively, and perhaps of more interest, they can show surprising connections between instances of discourse in different contexts.

3 Three types of challenges

In all research, different methodological problems arise depending on the aim of the study. In the following three sections, this study turns its attention to some central concerns for research on intertextual chains, and suggests some research topics relevant for research in specialized communication. The first section of the paper examines how the material for studying intertextual chains concerning administrative discourse can be limited, especially when using the internet as a source. The second section discusses how points of recontextualization can best be identified within an intertextual chain. Finally the third section concentrates on the problem of choosing the most relevant scope of analysis for different purposes.

3.1 Limiting the material

For scholars interested in administrative discourse, the internet is an invaluable resource. For example in the author's studies of the Finnish and Swedish laws on the taxation of motor vehicles and of the Finnish and Swedish laws on tax relief granted for household work, the core of the intertextual chain can be found directly on the internet on national parliament websites. The relevant documents from different phases of the legislative process are listed on the websites and there are links that lead to the documents. This list follows the legislative process in Finland and Sweden respectively, which demonstrates that these texts are regularly and systematically linked together. In this respect, the internet makes it easy to identify the intertextual chain, or rather the official traces of the intertextual chain. An earlier study (Koskela

2008) sketches the basic structure of the intertextual chain that covers the textual processes involved in a change of a tax law in Finland. Figure 1 highlights the horizontal intertextuality within the intertextual chain. There is also vertical intertextuality, i.e., there are paradigmatic relations between texts that are part of the same phase but have different functions (see Fairclough 2003). For example, media texts have here been placed last in the figure because they represent the least specialized discourse, but they can, of course, appear in all phases. (For a concrete list of types of genres that can belong to each category, see e.g. Klein 2000: 736; Adamzik 2002: 233.)

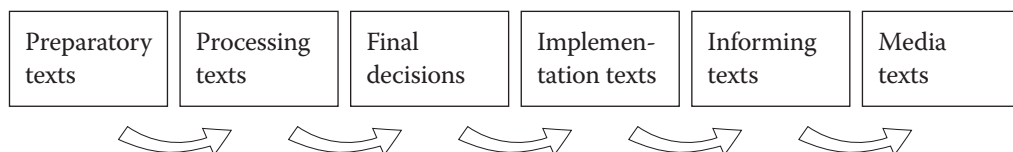


Figure 1: The structure of an intertextual chain concerning legislation

Preparatory texts are documents that precede the official processing of a government proposal for a new law or a law change. These texts can vary from official reports and investigations to policy documents, interviews and political speeches. These are the texts that begin the intertextual chain, but they are seldom officially documented on parliamentary websites. Therefore, for a researcher who is interested in collecting an intertextual chain in its totality, from the very beginning to the very end, the preparatory texts pose a challenge. Of course, one might ask why these texts should be included in a chain concerning specialized discourse, because they are not part of the formal administrative process. However, from the point of view of power relations and social structuring the preparatory texts could prove to be highly interesting and relevant. For example, it could be very interesting to consider the question of how much of the first oral discussion (and which aspects of it) turned into written texts to be further discussed and written down, and so stays within the intertextual chain until the very end. However, the material for such a study might be difficult to obtain: firstly, expert knowledge or participation in the process might be required, and secondly, the discussions might not have been documented and the texts might not have been published, either on the internet or elsewhere, or they might have long since been deleted.

The next two parts of the chain – *processing texts* that include the documents that have been used when handling the matter at the different stages of the legislative process and *final decisions*, for example a law or an administrative decision – are normally easy to find on the internet. These two parts of the intertextual chain offer the public a very polished picture of the matter, the ‘official truth’. This may make them less interesting as research objects, even though the recurring patterns in themselves are interesting, especially from a specialized communication point of view. More surprising intertextual connections, however, should probably not be expected at this stage.

Implementation texts are often not to be found on the internet because they are government-internal: they are texts where the implementation of the new law is carried out by the decision-makers, probably the ministry in charge, to the relevant authorities. For example, the changes in the Finnish laws concerning the taxation of vehicles required guidelines from the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Transport and Communications to, amongst others, the tax authorities, the vehicle administration organisation and to customs and excise. These

texts might be interesting for the study of an intertextual chain for several reasons. For example, they could be used as a point of comparison for information texts, which would make it possible for the researcher to compare interprofessional and professional-lay discourse. However, a potential problem with these texts is that in some cases they are either not written at all or, even worse, they are used as information texts for the public as they stand, despite originally being written for official use. Consequently, it is not always possible to decide whether a text was originally written to be an implementation text or an information text.

Information texts can normally be found on the internet, because these texts have been written in order to inform the citizens and the media of the decision. For these texts, the internet is a good forum because it gives the authorities, even governments and ministries, the opportunity to publish their own view of the matter without interference from the media. Therefore, these texts are often more variable than the previous ones and there is more vertical intertextuality involved. For example, different authorities can publish information from their own points of view, which adds to the number of texts in the intertextual chain considerably. It can also require some effort from the researcher to find all the relevant texts.

The same goes for *media texts*. There can be a wide variety of texts concerning the matter in the media – from news texts to columns and videos and expert commentaries. From the point of view of intertextuality and recontextualization, media texts are often interesting even for a specialized communication researcher because they tend to offer a new perspective on the matter. This of course can be traced back to the change of context, a true recontextualization; as the communicative process proceeds from the administrative context to the media context, and often from professional discourse to lay discourse. For example, in a study of the intertextual chain concerning the Swedish tax relief for household work (Koskela/Vik-Tuovinen 2009b), it was possible to show how the media, unlike official government information channels, focused on the potential problems caused by the new law (see example 1), and this was the aspect that was taken up on internet discussion forums where citizens discuss the matter.

<p>(1) Nytt ROT-avdrag gäller från måndag Redan på måndag den 8. december kan du som äger din bostad börja anlita hantverkare för att reparera och bygga om. Då ska regeringens förslag till nytt ROT-avdrag börja gälla. (Skatteverkets pressmeddelande 5.12.2008)</p>	<p>The new tax relief for household work will be applied starting on Monday Already on Monday, 8th of December it is possible for you who own your apartment to hire workers in order to repair and rebuild. It is then that the government's proposal for new tax relief will be applied. (Swedish tax authorities' press release Dec 5th, 2008)</p>
<p>Mycket oklart kring ROT-avdraget För en månad sedan återinförde regeringen rot-avdraget. Men hur reglerna ska tolkas är fortfarande oklart, och på Skatteverket säger man att det inte ens finns något rot-avdrag än. (Rapport, SVT 9.1.2009)</p>	<p>Much unclear about the tax relief for household work A month ago the government reintroduced the tax relief for household work. But how the rules should be applied is still unclear, and the tax authorities say that no such thing exists yet. (Swedish National Television news Jan 9th, 2009)</p>

To sum up, Figure 1 and especially the texts at its centre, offer ‘the clean picture’ – that is the official truth where disputes and disagreements have been left in the background. The parliament websites represent the matter in a way that is relevant from the official point of view. However, a search on the internet reveals that the neat order that the figure suggests is not always followed. For example, the previously mentioned case (Koskela/Vik-Tuovinen 2009b) on the Swedish tax relief for household work shows how the government can use the internet and the media for political purposes in the middle of the decision process, or before the legislative process has started. In the case mentioned, before the legislative process had begun, the Swedish government published a news bulletin on the government website where they declared that the tax relief measures in question would be established (December 2008). Later the piece of news was published in the media, and the media discussed the matter and its pros and cons throughout the legislative process (see example 1). With respect to the figure, this means that several information texts and media texts were published during the whole process and a lot of vertical intertextuality was present. This is a challenge for the research of the intertextual chain, because the media texts are so numerous and varied that it can be impossible to find the relevant ones and keep track of everything that is written. However, the effects of the media texts and public debates on the legislative process and the intertextual relations between the texts involved offer a highly relevant field of research.

3.2 Identifying points of recontextualization within a chain

The methodological challenges in research often concern operationalizing the central theoretical concepts chosen for the analysis. In this paper, those concepts are *recontextualization* and *context*, and the way of operationalizing these concepts again depends on what the *aim of the analysis* is.

In specialized communication research, one highly relevant aim is to trace the transformations of meaning that occur when the ‘same’ content is constructed *for intraprofessional use* (from one bureaucrat to another or between politicians) on the one hand and *for professional-lay communication* on the other hand. For that purpose the relevant points of recontextualization would concern the shifts from final decisions to informing texts as well as recontextualizations within the group of informing texts, sometimes even to media texts (see Figure 1 above). When the internet as a medium is concerned, even the recontextualizations from paper to the screen at any phase of the process can be interesting. In these cases, *recontextualization* includes a shift from inside the ‘bureaucracy’ to the public sphere. Example 2 illustrates what kind of changes can take place when an informing text, a press release, turns into media texts. As can be expected, media texts are shorter and more focused. In the first media text, technical terms are explained and some details of calculating the fuel consumption are omitted. In the second text, the annual vehicle tax has been omitted, and the focus is on the car tax only.

<p>(2) Regeringen föreslår att den bilskatt som tas ut på personbilar [i] samband med den första registreringen och den fordonsskatt som årligen tas ut på registrerade personbilar graderas enligt de koldioxidutsläpp som motsvarar bilens specifika bränsleförbrukning. (Finansministeriets pressmeddelande 109/2007, 2.11.2007)</p>	<p>The Government proposes that the car tax levied on passenger cars upon registration and the annual vehicle tax levied on all registered vehicles should be staggered in proportion to the carbon dioxide emissions resulting from the vehicle's specific consumption of fuel. (Ministry of Finance, Press release Nov 2th, 2007)</p>
<p>Både den bilskatt som betalas vid registreringen och den årliga fordonsskatten bestäms framöver av bilens koldioxidutsläpp. (Hbl 1.11.2007)</p>	<p>Both the car tax upon registration and the annual vehicle tax will from now on depend on the car's carbon dioxide emissions. (Hufvudstadsbladet Nov 1st, 2007)</p>
<p>Inköpskatten på personbilar graderas enligt koldioxidutsläpp. (Vbl 1.11.2007)</p>	<p>The purchase tax on cars will be graded according to carbon dioxide emissions. (Vasabladet, Nov 1st, 2007)</p>

A different aim for research might be to describe what kinds of regular intertextual chains there are and what kind of textual practices are typical of legislative processes in general. In this case, the whole chain would be interesting (cf. Klein 1991). However, for other aims, for instance if the researcher is interested in the conventional patterns of textual interaction and in the ways in which administrative texts draw from other texts, it might be relevant to have a look at the different texts within the group of processing texts. Between those texts, the context remains the same; the texts function within the administrative context, and therefore, the relevance of the concept of recontextualization could be put to question. For example, government propositions are often repeated in full in documents that comment on them, such as memorandums from parliamentary committees. Even though there is verbatim repetition, there is no doubt that a recontextualization has taken place, because the function of the repeated part of the text is different, in this case it is to be commented on and, in many cases, to be criticized. In such cases, recontextualization need not lead to linguistic changes even though it leads to transformations of meaning. Following from this, a more theoretically oriented research question would be to find out in which cases linguistic change is a requirement for transformations of meaning and when it is not, especially within legislative processes.

3.3 Defining the scope of the analysis

The third and final methodological challenge to be discussed concerns the scope of intertextual analysis, especially when it comes to the unit of analysis. In his definition of recontextualization, Linell (1998) does not precisely delimit the unit of analysis. On the contrary, he states that recontextualizations should be seen as sense-making practices where selected parts of discourses and their meanings in the prior 'quoted' discourse-in-context are used as resources in creating new meaning in the 'quoting' (target) text and its communicative contexts (Linell 1998: 145).

However, this is little help to the researcher trying to limit the scope of analysis to undertake a practical analysis of specialized communication. Linell talks about selected parts

or aspects of discourse, but does not make clear on what level these aspects should be found. Thus in each case the researcher needs to decide which are the most relevant units for the current research. According to Linell (1998: 145) it is possible to analyze linguistic expressions, concepts and propositions, 'facts', arguments and lines of argumentation, assessments, values and ideologies, knowledge and theoretical constructs, stories, and ways of seeing things. All these may be changed when one text turns into another thus creating an intertextual relation between the texts in question. The researcher needs to decide whether to look at all possible changes, which might lead to problems especially if the material is large, or only some changes that concern a predefined aspect.

One way of solving the problem is by looking at several intertextual chains of a similar type and comparing them systematically to determine which parts of the discourse are systematically changed at the same point in every chain. These features can be assumed to be meaningful for an analysis (Solin 2001: 259). Another starting-point is the one presented by Kjaer (2008) in her study of EU-legislation. The study starts from some central concepts in an EU law and follows how these concepts are recontextualized in different countries.

Still another possibility is to proceed from meaning to form. This means that the scope of analysis is limited to those parts of the texts that deliver the same or similar content. For example, the motivations for a law change or its main contents and expected consequences can be followed along the length of an intertextual chain. This choice makes it possible to trace linguistic transformations, but also to detect those points where the linguistic form has not been changed, even when the context has changed. In professional-lay communication, this forms an equally interesting question as to the types of transformations made: what motivates the idea that the same formulations can function for different readers and for different purposes, especially as far as specialists and citizens are concerned? Some tentative hypotheses to be tested are: (1) Textual recycling makes the authorities overlook points of recontextualization. (2) Textual recycling may mislead authorities to think that they can avoid responsibility for new interpretations that linguistic changes might entail.

4 Conclusions

Studying intertextual chains offers many opportunities for the study of specialized communication. Because specialized communication, especially in administration, is predictable and regular, the recurring patterns of intertextual relations in intertextual chains can reveal interesting aspects of the social structuring of professional discourse. They also illustrate how administrative work is regulated by texts and show how texts are used in order to reach political goals. Moreover, intertextual chains often cover intraprofessional, interprofessional and professional-lay discourse, and therefore offer new perspectives on key questions of research of specialized communication, that is if the language used meets the needs of the addressees. From a critical discourse analysis point of view, intertextual chains that run from interest group discussions to political bodies and out to the general public can be very enlightening, revealing how power is used in society.

This paper has discussed some methodological challenges for the study of intertextual chains that concern specialized communication. Some of the challenges have to do with choosing the right material and using the internet as a source. It has been shown that using the internet as a source has both strengths and weaknesses, which should be taken into consideration. The internet is invaluable in locating the official version of the intertextual chain,

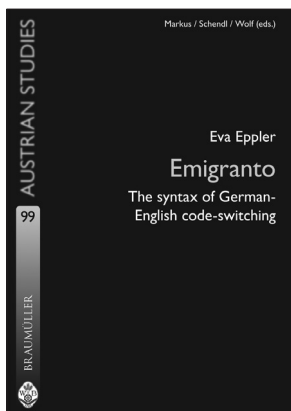
but has its limitations with regard to the more unofficial parts, especially the ones where the administration turns to the public with information, an instance of professional-lay discourse. Another challenge for the researcher is deciding what points of recontextualization might be of interest and choosing the scope for the analysis. In order to help the researcher to meet this challenge, this paper has suggested some potential research questions that could be of interest for researchers of specialized communication. •

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Emigranto

The syntax of German-English code-switching

Austrian Studies in English, vol. 99, ed. by Sabine Coelsch-Foisner, Manfred Markus and Herbert Schendl

This book is about "Emigranto", a German-English mixed code. More precisely, it presents a quantitative and qualitative account of the syntax of the speech produced in this bilingual language mode. It is based on audio-data collected from Austrian Jewish refugees from the National Socialist regime who settled in London in the late 1930s. The analysis shows that the bilingual informants possess two identifiable linguistic systems, each with its grammatical rules, and that the mixed variety results from the interaction between lexical elements and grammatical rules from these languages.

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