

CAIS Paper: Time Changes Things: Time as a Linguistic Resource for Professionals in Information-Intensive Fields

Abstract: In accounts of identity and making sense of professional roles, time is a linguistic resource librarians and pharmacists, members of information-rich professions, draw upon. Accounts of time organize narratives of professionalism, make sense of new and evolving roles, frame a profession's future and create meaning from the profession's past.

1. Introduction

Librarians and pharmacists are members of information-rich professions. They provide vital information services to the general public for work, education, recreation, and/or health-related needs. Time is a discursive resource that both librarians and pharmacists draw upon in accounts of their identities and in the processes of making sense of professional roles. Time serves as a way for members of these professions to organize professional narratives, to understand new and evolving professional roles, and to account for their profession's progress and create meaning from its past. As individuals make sense of, or describe, themselves they construct narratives. The shape of these narratives "[precedes] the content, the events are selected and fitted into their places" (Taylor and Wetherell 1999, 41). In other words, time is a linguistic resource employed by librarians and pharmacists when they develop and shape accounts of themselves as professionals. Presenting findings from two separate interdisciplinary studies, this presentation will illustrate how time was used as a linguistic resource by librarians as part of their professional identity construction and by pharmacists when they make sense of new professional roles.

2. Research Designs

Both studies being reported here used a social constructionist theoretical framework and are part of larger research projects. Hicks used a social constructionist inspired discourse analysis approach, developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), to focus on the interpretive repertoires, or linguistic resources, librarians used to account for their actions, beliefs, and even themselves in different contexts. Specifically, this study focused on the interpretive repertoires used by librarians to construct their professional identities. Within this framework, professional identity is defined as a description, or representation, of the self within professional practices. Repertoires are the common linguistic resources that link members of professions. They consist of words and phrases that provide professionals with a shared worldview and sense of self.

Three different data sources were used to uncover the identity repertoires of librarians: professional journal articles, email discussion lists, and research interviews. Text-based data sources included over 1,600 journal articles and 800

pages of email discussions. In addition, 16 interviews with MLIS (or equivalent) holding librarians working in various library settings (academic, public, school, and special) were completed. The goal of the analysis was to identify when and how time was used by librarians to account for and describe themselves as professionals. The data was analysed using a three-step procedure:

1. Individual units of the data, such as an interview or journal article, were analysed for inconsistencies and contradictions. As the context and function of the repertoire is the focus of this analytical approach, attention was paid to how words or phrases were used, the context in which they were used, and the reasons they were employed.
2. These inconsistencies and contradictions were then compared to other parts of the data to identify recurring context-dependent patterns.
3. The assumptions that underpinned these patterns were then identified. (Talja 1999; 2005)

Schindel also used a discourse analytic approach based on the work of Potter and Wetherell (1987) to examine the discourses of pharmacists as prescribers in professional texts. For this study, role and identity were understood to be closely linked. As a professional learns about her or his role, she or he makes sense of her- or himself as a professional, resulting in a professional identity. Data was collected in two phases. First documents describing pharmacist prescribing developed by pharmacy organizations in Canada, including the Alberta College of Pharmacists, Alberta Pharmacists Association, Canadian Society of Hospital Pharmacists, and the Canadian Pharmacists Association were collected for analysis. All professional texts were accessible on the organizations' websites. Second, pharmacists participating in a subsequent phase of the larger study were invited to contribute texts relevant to them as prescribers. The final data set consisted of 44 texts including position statements, professional standards of practice, prescribing application guides, publications describing pharmacy practice, and newsletter articles spanning a time frame of 2001- 2013.

The data was first analysed for patterns emerging from variabilities and consistencies in the language used. The intended function and consequences of the texts were considered, with attention to time as a language resource. Next, the texts were re-read and the variations, consistencies, functions, consequences, and omissions in the texts were documented. To identify "distinctions participants actually make in their interactions" (Potter & Wetherell 1987, 170), portions of the analysis were further explored through participant orientation during phase two of the study. This step was particularly important for this study as the differences between institutional discourses, as represented by professional organizations, and how practising pharmacists made sense of those documents "have important implications for ... practice" (Potter & Wetherell 1987, 170).

3. Findings

Time as a linguistic resource, in Hicks's study, was most often used by librarians in the change repertoire. In this repertoire, librarians highlighted shifting roles and user expectations. The future of the profession was often the

focus of this repertoire and the flexibility of librarians as professionals in adapting to change was showcased. Specifically, time was used by librarians when they discussed the historical and traditional roots of the profession, the profession's future, and when they described how the profession had and had not changed. In this example, Isaacson (2007) used past professional practices to critique modern librarianship and highlight librarians' reluctance to change: "Unfortunately, the 1984 reference model endures in too many libraries today: librarians passively waiting at a desk for people to approach" (41). Words such as "dire," "demise," "risk," "fast," "resistant," and "adapt" were commonly used in relation to time as a linguistic resource in the change repertoire. These words are action-oriented and gave librarians' texts and speech a sense of consequence and anticipation.

In Schindel's study, time was associated with pharmacists' past, present, and future roles. Time was used to emphasize the future and discursively construct the act of pharmacist prescribing as moving the profession forward. As a linguistic resource, time was used in different ways depending on its relationship to the passing of legislation approving pharmacist prescribing. Prior to the passing of the legislation, "time is of the essence" was emphasized: "For years pharmacists have wanted to enhance their role within the health care system, and the time to make this happen is now!" (Alberta College of Pharmacists 2003, 1). During this period, time was also used to connect the past, present, and future. Prior to approval of pharmacist prescribing legislation it was understood that pharmacists prescribed medication and had "been doing so for decades" (Bacovsky 2003, iv). Following approval, stories about pharmacists who obtained prescribing authorization were featured: "When the opportunity finally came, I knew we had to step up and really prove we could do it" (Alberta College of Pharmacists 2008, 8).

4. Research Contribution

These research projects contribute to the LIS literature by exploring how professional identity and new roles are made sense of by members of information-rich professions. Librarians, as information specialists, and pharmacists, as health information specialists, provide their clients with important services for their work, educational, recreational, and health needs. By exploring how librarians and pharmacists talk and write about time, these research projects provide insights into how these professions account for professional practices, which in turn influences how they design and provide their information-intensive services. The action-oriented linguistic resources associated with time used by both librarians and pharmacists underscored professions rooted in the past, but excited about the future. Words such as "dire" and "demise" demonstrate librarians' fear of the consequences of continuing to cling to traditional services. By not adapting to changing technologies, user expectations, and economic constraints, the profession will be left behind and users will look elsewhere for information services. Pharmacists' use of the concept "time is of the essence" positioned the profession as ready and excited for change, even if this change had already been occurring "for decades."

Changes in professional roles and identity occur over time. Dall’Alba (2009) argued there is value in past experiences, stating that “threads carried forward from the past can serve as resources in the present, as well as providing openings for change that continues into the future” (p. 60). In other words, a sense of time, specifically a sense of the past, provides a profession’s members with sense of professional continuity as they move from old to new (Goodrick and Reay 2010) that can enrich an existing professional identity (Pratt, Rockmann, and Kaufmann 2006). For librarians and pharmacists, time is a linguistic resource members of both professions use to organize narratives of librarianship and pharmacy practice. As librarians construct their identities and pharmacists make sense of their new roles as prescribers, the past, present, and future of each profession becomes the focus of writing and speech. For both professions, the function or purpose of time was to highlight the continuity of professional practice; the readiness of both professions for challenges and changes resulting from legislative, technological, economic, and service changes; and the abilities of both professions to seize future possibilities.

5. References

- Alberta College of Pharmacists. 2003. *Pharmacist prescribing: Understanding the model (Volume 1)*. Accessed February 12, 2013
from <https://pharmacists.ab.ca/Downloads/documentloader.ashx?id=6055>
- Alberta College of Pharmacists. 2008. *ACP News*. Accessed January 16, 2015.
<https://pharmacists.ab.ca/sites/default/files/newsletters/ACPNews%20Nov-Dec-2008.pdf>
- Bacovsky, Rosemary A. 2003. *Pharmacists prescribing in Alberta: An examination of the literature and pharmacist practices. Report prepared for the Alberta College of Pharmacists*. Accessed February 12, 2013
from <https://pharmacists.ab.ca/Downloads/documentloader.ashx?id=6052>
- Dall’Alba, Gloria. 2009. *Learning to be Professionals*. New York: Springer.
- Goodrick, Elizabeth and Trish Reay. 2010. “Florence Nightingale Endures: Legitimizing a New Professional Role Identity.” *Journal of Management Studies* 47 (1): 55–84.

- Isaacson, David. 2007. "What's Still Wrong with Reference." *Library Journal* 132 (19): 41.
- Potter, Jonathan and Margaret Wetherell. 1987. *Discourse and Social Psychology: Beyond Attitudes and Behaviour*. London: Sage Publications.
- Pratt, Michael G., Kevin W. Rockmann and Jeffrey B. Kaufmann. 2006. "Constructing Professional Identity: The Role of Work and Identity Learning Cycles in the Customization of Identity among Medical Residents." *Academy of Management Journal* 49 (2): 235–262.
- Taylor, Stephanie and Margaret Wetherell. 1999. "A Suitable Time and Place: Speaker's Use of 'Time' to do Discursive Work in Narratives of Nation and Personal Life." *Time Society* 8: 39-58.