

# FROM SPECIALIZED TO ORDINARY DISCOURSE: HYBRIDIZATION, INTERDISCIPLINARITY, AND INTERCULTURALITY

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**Abstract:** *The contemporary linguistic reality, in which language, discourse and society are co-constructed, highlights the increasing permeability of discursive boundaries. This situation leads to phenomena of hybridisation and discursive mutation that make it difficult to construct homogeneous corpora and strictly classify genres. Drawing on work in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, as well as research conducted as part of the Carnets du Cediscor, this article offers a theoretical reflection on the notion of discursive hybridisation, relating it to the concepts of interdiscursivity and generic mutation.*

*In the first part, we define hybridisation as a process whereby elements from different discursive spheres (scientific, media, political, everyday) combine within a single act of communication, producing mixed forms that are difficult to classify. We show that this hybridisation is particularly evident in the media, an interface between specialist knowledge and non-expert audiences, particularly in the media coverage of health or environmental crises. Recent examples, such as the circulation of medical terminology during the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrate how scientific vocabulary takes on political and moral values when it is used in public debate.*

*In the second part, we examine the methodological and epistemological issues that these hybrid configurations pose for the constitution of corpora and the description of discursive genres. Finally, we put forward the hypothesis that interdisciplinarity and interculturality are essential heuristic frameworks for analysing these contemporary language practices: the former by articulating the contributions of linguistics, sociology, political science and cultural studies; the latter by taking into account the variation in forms of hybridisation from one linguistic and cultural space to another.*

**Keywords:** *discursive hybridization; interdisciplinarity; interculturality; discursive genres; permeability.*

## Introduction

The contemporary linguistic reality is increasingly marked by a phenomenon that Boutet and Maingueneau have described as the *co-construction of language, discourse, and society* (Boutet et Maingueneau, 2005: 15). This observation highlights not only the dynamic and relational nature of discourse but also the instability of its borders. In today's communicative practices, discourse types rarely remain confined to their traditional domains. Instead, they interact, intersect and hybridize, generating forms that are more fluid and less easily classifiable.

This raises a fundamental difficulty for linguists and discourse analysts: how to construct homogeneous and stable corpora when the very objects of study are constantly shifting and mutating? The challenge is not merely methodological but also epistemological, since the permeability of discursive boundaries undermines any rigid taxonomy of genres. What once appeared as “specialized” or “ordinary” discourse, for instance, may now present hybrid features that blur their distinction.

The problem, however, is not entirely new. As early as 2000, the *Carnets du Cediscor* examined “the discursive encounters between science and politics in the media,” showing that the interpenetration of discursive logics was already evident at the turn of the century (Cediscor, 2000). Later, in 2014, the same series addressed “the permeability of the boundaries between ordinary and specialized discourse in genres and discourses,” further emphasizing the hybrid character of contemporary communicative practices (Cediscor, 2014). These works made visible the ways in which features traditionally associated with one discursive sphere, scientific or specialized, could be inserted into another, political or ordinary, thus creating hybrid configurations that resist easy categorization.

This article takes as its starting point the recognition of this discursive hybridization and seeks to explore its implications for linguistic research. More specifically, it aims to:

1. Discuss the theoretical foundations of discursive hybridization and permeability of boundaries.
2. Illustrate how hybridization manifests in the intersections between specialized (scientific, technical) and ordinary or political discourse.
3. Reflect on the methodological and epistemological challenges raised by these discursive mutations.
4. Highlight the role of interdisciplinarity and interculturality as key tools for understanding and explaining these phenomena, as underlined by Charaudeau (2010).

## Language, Discourse, and Society as Co-construction

In their seminal work, Boutet and Maingueneau (2005: 15) argue that language, discourse, and society are not separate entities but co-constructed dimensions of the same reality. This theoretical perspective highlights the impossibility of treating discourse as a stable, self-contained object. Instead, discourse is shaped by social practices while it simultaneously shapes them in return. The “permeability” of discursive boundaries is thus a necessary outcome of the interdependence between linguistic and social processes.

From this standpoint, discourse analysis must go beyond the strict classification of genres and instead consider the dynamic interplay between discourses. Genres are not fixed categories but evolving configurations, open to redefinition as they intersect with

other discourses. This approach provides a conceptual foundation for understanding hybridization, since it frames discourses as inherently relational rather than autonomous.

### **Cediscor's Contribution**

The *Carnets du Cediscor* have been particularly influential in bringing attention to discursive permeability. In 2000, one issue focused on “the discursive encounters between science and politics in the media,” examining how specialized scientific discourse was appropriated and recontextualized in the political sphere (Cediscor, 2000). Such encounters have revealed that political discourse often integrates the authority of scientific language while reinterpreting it to serve rhetorical or ideological purposes.

More than a decade later, the 2014 volume revisited the problem by analyzing “the permeability of the boundaries between ordinary and specialized discourse” (Cediscor, 2014). This work demonstrated that the linguistic features typical of specialized genres, terminological precision, argumentative rigor, and technical vocabulary can migrate into ordinary discourse, particularly in media representations, while features of everyday speech such as metaphors, narratives, or humor, can infiltrate specialized communication. This bidirectional movement complicates any attempt to maintain a clear boundary between the “ordinary” and the “specialized.”

### **Defining Discursive Hybridization**

The notion of *discursive hybridization* emerges from these observations and designates the process through which elements belonging to different discursive spheres, scientific, political, ordinary, literary, interact and combine within the same communicative act. Hybridization does not simply involve borrowing; it transforms the very identity of the discourse, producing new, mixed forms that challenge traditional typologies.

This concept is closely related to that of *discursive mutations* which refer to the transformations observed in genres over time as they adapt to changing communicative environments. Hybridization is one of the key drivers of such mutations, leading to the emergence of new genres or the reshaping of existing ones.

The theoretical framework outlined here thus emphasizes three key points:

1. Discourses are co-constructed with social practices (Boutet et Maingueneau, 2005).
2. The permeability of boundaries is empirically attested by Cediscor's analyses (2000, 2014).
3. Hybridization and mutation are intrinsic to discursive evolution, making them central objects of study for contemporary discourse analysis.

### **Hybridization in the Media**

The media complex constitutes one of the most fertile spaces for discursive hybridization, since it mediates between specialized knowledge and the broader public. Scientific discourse, for instance, rarely circulates in its pure form. When it enters the media, it undergoes processes of simplification, dramatization, and personalization. Technical terms may be retained but are often accompanied by metaphors, analogies, or narratives that make them accessible to non-specialists. This recontextualization transforms the discourse: it is no longer purely scientific, nor entirely ordinary, but a hybrid form situated at the intersection of both (Cediscor, 2014: 88).

The COVID-19 pandemic provided a recent illustration. During the health crisis, medical terminology such as “flattening the curve,” “herd immunity,” or “R rate” became common in news reports and everyday conversations. These terms carried their scientific precision but were simultaneously infused with political and moral connotations when used in public debates. As a result, the discourse was hybrid: at once medical, political, and popular.

### **Science and Politics**

The interplay between scientific and political discourses is not a new phenomenon. As Cediscor (2000) highlighted, scientific expertise has long been mobilized in political contexts to legitimize decisions, policies, and ideologies. In such cases, scientific discourse is reframed through rhetorical strategies typical of political speech: persuasion, appeal to values, and emotional mobilization.

Climate change debates offer a telling example. Scientific reports produced by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are highly technical, yet when cited in political discourse, they are reframed as tools of persuasion. Politicians may emphasize or downplay certain findings depending on ideological agendas, integrating scientific terminology into a political narrative that aims to secure consensus or to polarize. This process produces a hybrid discourse where scientific authority and political rhetoric intertwine.

### **Ordinary Discourse and the Specialized**

Hybridization also flows in the opposite direction: ordinary discourse influences specialized communication. Popular metaphors and idiomatic expressions frequently infiltrate scientific or technical discourse, especially in pedagogical or outreach contexts. For example, the metaphor of the “genetic code” or the “information superhighway” has shaped not only public understanding but also the ways scientists themselves describe their objects of study. These borrowings from ordinary language reveal that specialized discourse is not impermeable but is itself shaped by cultural and linguistic practices circulating in society.

Such interactions complicate the dichotomy between “specialized” and “ordinary.” Instead of two distinct categories, we observe a continuum where features circulate bidirectionally. Discursive hybridization thus destabilizes rigid classifications and calls for more flexible analytical frameworks capable of capturing this complexity.

### **Methodological challenges and interdisciplinarity**

One of the major methodological challenges raised by discursive hybridization lies in the construction of research corpora. Traditional approaches in discourse analysis often rely on relatively homogeneous corpora, defined by clear genre boundaries: scientific articles, political speeches, media interviews, everyday conversations, and so forth. However, when these categories overlap and hybridize, the task of selecting, delimiting, and classifying texts becomes increasingly problematic (Boutet et Maingueneau, 2005: 21).

For example, a televised debate on a health crisis may simultaneously contain scientific explanation, political persuasion, and personal testimony. Should such a discourse be classified as media discourse, political discourse, or scientific communication? Any rigid categorization risks oversimplifying its hybrid nature. This problem has profound implications for corpus design, since excluding hybrid data would mean ignoring the very transformations that characterize contemporary discourse.

### **The Limits of Monodisciplinarity**

The hybridization of discourses also challenges the epistemological limits of monodisciplinary approaches. A purely linguistic analysis focusing on syntax, terminology, or rhetorical structure may capture some features but miss the socio-political dynamics that explain why hybridization occurs in the first place. Conversely, a purely sociological or political approach may highlight power relations but neglect the linguistic mechanisms that make hybridization possible.

Patrick Charaudeau (2010: 12), in his work *Pour une interdisciplinarité focalisée dans les sciences humaines et sociales*, insists on the necessity for researchers to recognize their own epistemological limits. He invites scholars to engage in what he calls “focused interdisciplinarity,” an approach that draws upon insights from neighboring disciplines without dissolving the specificity of each. Interdisciplinarity thus becomes not an optional enrichment but a methodological necessity for capturing the complexity of hybrid discourses.

### **Interdisciplinarity as an Analytical Tool**

In practice, interdisciplinarity allows discourse analysts to combine methods and perspectives:

- Linguistic analysis to examine lexical, syntactic, and rhetorical features of hybridization.
- Sociological analysis to understand the social practices and institutions that foster discursive permeability.
- Political analysis to reveal the strategic uses of hybrid discourse in public debate.
- Cultural analysis to account for metaphors, narratives, and imaginaries that circulate between ordinary and specialized discourses.

Such an integrative framework makes it possible to do justice to the multidimensional nature of hybrid discourses. It also aligns with the broader turn in the humanities and social sciences toward problem-oriented research, where disciplinary boundaries are deliberately crossed to address complex phenomena.

### **Discursive Hybridization Across Cultures**

While hybridization is a structural phenomenon of discourse in contemporary societies, its manifestations are deeply shaped by cultural and linguistic contexts. Discourses do not hybridize in the same way across cultures: the circulation of terms, metaphors, and rhetorical forms depends on shared imaginaries, cultural values, and institutional traditions. For instance, the metaphorical framing of scientific issues often reflects national discursive cultures. In English-speaking media, climate change is frequently cast in warlike terms (“the fight against global warming”), while in French media, it is more commonly presented in terms of solidarity and collective responsibility (“la lutte collective contre le réchauffement climatique”).

This cultural variability underscores the importance of an intercultural perspective when analyzing hybridization. Without attention to these differences, there is a risk of projecting one cultural model onto another, thereby overlooking the local logics that structure hybrid discourses.

### **Interculturality as a Conceptual Framework**

The concept of interculturality provides a valuable tool for explaining discursive permeability. It designates not only the coexistence of multiple cultural codes but also their interaction and mutual transformation. In this sense, interculturality mirrors discursive hybridization: just as discourses mix and mutate, so too do cultural references and interpretative frameworks.

For example, the dissemination of medical discourse in multilingual societies occurs when biomedical terminology originating in English circulates in non-English contexts and it is often adapted through translation, borrowing, or calquing. Each linguistic community reinterprets and recontextualizes the borrowed terms according to its cultural and communicative needs. The result is a hybrid discourse that is at once globally recognizable and locally specific.

### **Interculturality and the Politics of Knowledge**

Intercultural perspectives also draw attention to the politics of knowledge circulation. Hybrid discourses often emerge at the crossroads of unequal power relations between languages and cultures. For instance, the dominance of English as the *lingua franca* of science means that specialized terms are frequently imported into other languages without translation. This asymmetry produces discursive hybrids that reflect global hierarchies as much as local practices.

Therefore, acknowledging interculturality enriches the understanding of hybridization by situating it within the broader dynamics of globalization, translation, and cultural exchange. It shows that discursive permeability is not merely a linguistic or methodological phenomenon but also a cultural and political one.

There are several causes of hybridization: mediatization and the transformation of communication practices under the influence of mass media and digital platforms which favor formats accessible to wide audiences; globalization through the circulation of discourses across linguistic and cultural boundaries resulting in hybrid forms adapted to local contexts; institutional pressures: the need for specialized domains such as science or law to legitimize themselves in public arenas, which prompts them to adopt features of ordinary or political discourse; technological change: new digital genres such as podcasts, blogs, and social media posts, which inherently mix registers and discursive practices.

### **Conclusion**

The analysis undertaken in this article has highlighted the profound transformations that characterize contemporary discourse. The starting point was the recognition formulated by Boutet and Maingueneau (2005) that language, discourse, and society are co-constructed, a perspective that necessarily leads to the acknowledgment of porous and shifting discursive boundaries. This theoretical insight has been corroborated by empirical observations, particularly those presented in the *Carnets du Cediscor* (2000, 2014), which documented the hybridization of scientific, political, and ordinary discourses in media contexts.

From these premises, three major conclusions can be drawn:

- Discursive hybridization is a structural phenomenon. It is not an exception or a marginal occurrence but a constitutive feature of contemporary communicative practices. Hybridization manifests in multiple directions: scientific discourse infiltrates political and media spheres; political discourse

borrowing the authority of scientific terminology; and ordinary discourse permeates specialized genres.

- Hybridization creates methodological and epistemological challenges. The permeability of boundaries complicates corpus construction and undermines rigid taxonomies of genres. This calls for greater methodological flexibility and for the recognition of the limits of monodisciplinary approaches.
- Interdisciplinarity and interculturality provide essential tools. As Charaudeau (2010) has argued, focused interdisciplinarity enables researchers to integrate insights from neighboring fields without erasing disciplinary specificities. In turn, interculturality allows the situation of discursive hybridization within the dynamics of globalization, translation, and cultural exchange. Together, these perspectives enrich the understanding of hybrid discourses and their broader implications.

In conclusion, the study of discursive hybridization represents not only a challenge but also an opportunity. By embracing interdisciplinarity and interculturality, discourse analysts can better capture the complexity of communicative practices in a globalized, mediatised world. Future research should continue to explore hybrid genres across languages, cultures, and media, in order to map the evolving landscape of discourse and to refine the analytical tools that allow us to understand it.

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