

Preface

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**The Discourse of Nurse-Patient Interactions: Contrasting
the communicative styles of U.S. and international nurses**

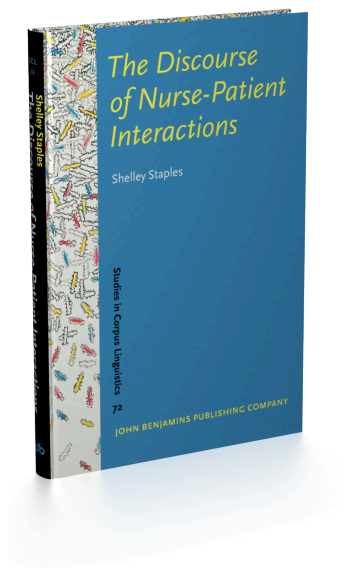
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Preface

What are the linguistic characteristics of nurse-patient interactions? What are the discourse characteristics of the nurse-patient assessment interviews used to train future nurses? How does the language of patients differ from that of nurses? How does the conversational style of Internationally Educated Nurses (IENs) differ from the typical interactional styles of US Educated Nurses (USNs)? And how do all of these considerations relate to the quality of nurse communication and patient satisfaction?

These are obviously important issues in the context of increasing demands for well-trained medical personnel. In the U.S., many nurses are internationally educated (IENs), who have been trained in other countries and have first languages other than English. These nurses sometimes have different norms for conversational interactions from USNs, which can result in major communication difficulties. To improve the communication skills of IENs (as well as USNs), we first need a comprehensive linguistic description of nurse-patient interactions. However, to date, there have been few empirical analyses of nurse-patient discourse, and no previous studies comparing the discourse of IENs versus USNs. The present book fills that gap.

Based on a large-scale corpus analysis of nurse-patient assessment interviews, the book provides a complete linguistic register description of this register, which then provides the background for detailed comparisons of the communicative styles of IENs versus USNs. The book begins with the situational context of nurse-patient interactions, describing the setting, participants, social roles, and communicative purposes of nurse-patient assessment interviews. Nurse-patient interviews are typically structured in terms of interactional 'phases' (e.g., greetings and small talk, elicitation of the complaint, the exam); the book introduces us to each of these segments of the interaction, which are subsequently used as the framework for the linguistic analyses.

The linguistic descriptions cover all linguistic levels, including prosodic characteristics, fluency characteristics like the rate of speech, interactional characteristics like the amount of speech and types of pauses, and a wide range of lexico-grammatical characteristics. The coverage begins with a description of nurse-patient interactions, contrasting the discourse of nurses to the discourse of patients. With that background, the description moves on to the central issue here: a comparison of the discourse styles of IENs versus USNs. Differences in the

interactional styles of IENs vs USNs are covered first, including descriptions of the overall amount of speech, use and types of questions, discourse markers, and the ways of opening and closing the different phases. This is then followed by more detailed descriptions of particular lexico-grammatical features, focusing especially on features used in different ways or to different extents by the two groups of nurses (e.g., pronouns, conditionals, stance features).

Possibly the most innovative aspect of the study is that it includes large-scale corpus-based analysis of prosodic characteristics (as well as fluency and non-verbal behavior like smiling, hand-shaking, and physical touching). Corpus-based prosodic analysis is still in its infancy, and there have been few previous attempts to provide a linguistic description of a register from a prosodic perspective. The present book describes differences between IENs and USNs with respect characteristics several prosodic features, including speech rate, number and length of silent pauses, pitch range, tone choice (i.e., falling, rising, level), prominence (sentence stress), and paratone (use of pitch to mark topic shifts in discourse). These descriptions complement the more traditional lexico-grammatical and interactional analyses of this register. However, this part of the study is also important methodologically, illustrating how it is possible to carry out empirical corpus-based analyses of prosodic features.

In summary, *THE DISCOURSE OF NURSE-PATIENT INTERACTIONS* will be of interest to discourse analysts generally, as a model for how a spoken register can be described from a corpus perspective, as well as scholars interested specifically in nurse-patient discourse, and the ways in which conversational styles can vary across varieties of English.

Douglas Biber