AL-FARABI KAZAKH NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Department of International Relations

Chair of Diplomatic Translation

**Translation business in the field of international and legal relations**

**“Translation of Scientific and Technical Documents”**

2024-2025 academic year, fall semester

**Lecture 11**

**Module 3: Scientific researches and abstracts**

**Lecture 11: Introducing professional scientific discourse**

The Royal Society, founded in 1662, is the national academy of science in the UK. In January 2015 it appointed Professor Brian Cox to a new role as Professor for Public Engagement in Science. In creat- ing this position, the Royal Society acknowledged the importance of engaging with the public to publicize the Royal Society’s activities and to stimulate public interest and enthusiasm for science. However, the appointee’s remit goes further than that; the Royal Society was look- ing for someone, an excellent communicator with media experience, who could also ‘contribute to a greater public understanding of science and the importance of experiment, evidence and understand- ing uncertainty’, who could ‘increase public understanding of scien- tific issues which inform policy debates on important issues’ and whose public engagement would ‘strengthen the case for increased support for science’ (Royal Society n.d.). This appointment is just one illustration of the current significance of science as public discourse. However, it is also illustrative of science’s dependence on public fund- ing and relationships between science and government policy. With much scientific research being publicly funded, there is increasing awareness of the need for the fruits of that activity to be made more accessible, not just to the funding bodies, but also to the general public whose taxes contribute to government coffers. It also high- lights a need, as perceived by scientific institutions, for scientific communication not only to focus on breakthroughs and significant findings, but also to impart to the public an understanding of scien- tific methods, to underline the importance of evidence in drawing conclusions and to draw attention to the uncertainty inherent in much scientific endeavour.

Before examining some examples it is useful to reflect briefly on what it means to popularize science. Popularization is often under- stood as the simplification, distortion or dumbing down of science, a view that is reflected also in the term ‘vulgarization’. Professional sci- ence and popular science are commonly conceived of and analysed as two separate discourses. As Myers (2003: 266) explains, in critiquing this view, it rests on the assumptions that scientists are the experts on what constitutes science, informing an ignorant public, and that sci- entific knowledge moves in one direction only, from scientists to soci- ety, through written statements. According to this perspective, professional scientific discourse is translated and simplified to pro- duce popular science discourse. However, those assumptions are questioned in a special issue of *Discourse Studies* introduced by Myers’ contribution. Here he suggests that we instead view populari- zation as a continuum and that we think about how scientists are involved in a range of genres, from informal conversations with col- leagues to writing grant proposals, from giving lectures to writing journal articles. Thus, it is helpful to think in terms of degrees of popularization, rather than a stark distinction between two discourses.

Below are some scenarios, among many, which exemplify various degrees of popularization.

* Articles in popular science magazines like *Scientific American* are aimed as an educated readership with an interest in science. This readership includes professional scientists who are not specialists in the field about which they are reading. The high degree of spe- cialization of branches and sub-branches of science means that professional scientists in one domain may have little specialist understanding of science from other domains, thus requiring accounts that are accessible to them.
* Most scientific funding proposals require applicants to produce accessible versions or summaries of their research proposal. This is because the proposals are evaluated by subject specialists, but also by people who are experienced in other fields but who may not be specialists in that particular field of knowledge. Once the funding has been awarded, accessible summaries may also be used by fund- ing organizations to publicize the kinds of research being funded, perhaps also to show transparency of the evaluation system or to justify the use of public funds.
* Television documentaries on scientific themes are widely consumed by audiences who may expect to be informed but for whom being entertained may also be an important motivating factor in watch- ing. The audiovisual dimension of the communication is key in achieving those aims.
* Popular science news websites, for example, Science News (www. sciencenews.org) and Science Daily (www.sciencedaily.com), also use multiple communication modes to engage readers.
* Science museums explain exhibitions for those who may not have much specialist knowledge. Many also organize interactive exhibits for children, often targeting them by age group or education stage.
* Citizen science initiatives bring non-professionals into the sphere of scientific practice. Non-scientists are motivated not only to become informed about science, but also to participate in scientific activity themselves and thus contribute to scientific research. This kind of initiative helps to counter the prevalent perception of pro- fessional science and its discourse as being elitist and exclusionary.