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**SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE
IN SOCIOHISTORICAL CONTEXT**
*The Philosophical Transactions
of the Royal Society of London,
1675-1975*

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LAWRENCE ERLBAUM ASSOCIATES, PUBLISHERS
1999 Mahwah, New Jersey
London

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Editor's Introduction

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The Royal Society of London and the journal that early became affiliated with it, *The Philosophical Transactions*, have long been of interest to science historians, rhetoricians, literary critics, and linguists. These two institutions have been seen as influential in the formation of modern science, the development of scientific language and indeed all modern writing style, and the emergence of the periodical with its corresponding creation of an intellectual and literary public sphere. The Royal Society and the *Philosophical Transactions* are associated with deep changes in where social and intellectual authority resides, the means by which authoritative knowledge emerges and is asserted, and intellectual authority's relationship to the state, church, and other centers of authority and power. However, the story that has emerged through these multiple arenas of inquiry is not simple or simply progressive. The society and journal have turned out to be the site of many historical contingencies, contradictory and particular interests and dynamics, ideologies and beliefs, and individual careers, each having their own shape. What we now call science only emerged and promoted itself within and as part of the great, teeming social, cultural, representational, symbolic, material, economic, and political world.

Dwight Atkinson's study *Scientific Discourse in Sociohistorical Context: The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London, 1675–1975* makes several major contributions to our understanding of how these two interrelated institutions have come to shape the world of knowledge and authority in which we now live.

First, this book provides the most complete and particular institutional account of a scientific journal, in this case, a journal that stands as an icon of scientific publication. Important material recounted here appears nowhere else in the historical literature, including details about the operation of the journal and its relation to the society. In literary studies it is well understood that the founders and editors of journals are important actors in opening up, defining, and maintaining a cultural space that encourages particular kinds of productions, but beyond the exemplary work done on Oldenburg by the Halls, little work has been done on scientific editors. Atkinson's work is especially important because it embeds the history of the journal and its editors within the history of the Royal Society and within other developments in science and society.

Even more originally, Atkinson applies a powerful multidimensional linguistic analysis to the contents of the journal to show the larger trends of changing linguistic practice. Atkinson then interprets these corpus-based findings in relation to a detailed rhetorical analysis to reveal the changing position of the author, object, and narrative in the texts, and even more important, to locate tensions within the discourse. These tensions, when considered within the history of science, suggest the struggles between the personal gentlemanly forms of authority and trust on which the Royal Society was founded and object-oriented, distanced discourses of distrust that developed within scientific disagreement.

Atkinson's synthesis of historical, linguistic, rhetorical, and cultural analysis combines the several lines of inquiry into the society and journal and shows how these different lines of inquiry can mutually lend support to each other's project. These multiple perspectives make visible and intelligible complex communicative dynamics that could be seen from no single vantage point. Atkinson also reminds us how such deep historical examinations of linguistic and rhetorical practices as carried out by particular individuals within particular historical circumstances have direct bearing on how and what we read and write now, and thereby need to inform our current teaching of language, so as to provide access to those who have come to be excluded in the historical emergence of our current practices. We live and communicate within the social consequences of our history, and only by developing a sociohistoric under-

standing of where we are can we direct ourselves to a more satisfying place. For those of us who study and teach language, the social history we necessarily focus on is the sociohistory of language practices.