

On the 20th anniversary of AELFE - A note from the President

The field of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) is attracting the interest of an increasing number of teachers and researchers, who respond to the growing need for the study of languages applied to a wide range of academic and professional domains in our globalized, multilingual society. From diverse situations and perspectives, LSP scholars have engaged in debates that have contributed to the development and consolidation of the discipline. In the year 2012, LSP celebrates its 50th anniversary, which Upton (2012) highlights in the past issue of *Ibérica*, reviewing how it has evolved over the past decades and envisaging prospects for the future. His diachronic account of central LSP issues – namely needs analysis, language, and materials and methods – attests the shift in focus towards a dynamic, socially-embedded activity that takes into account the complexities of texts, contexts, and learners' needs. Another recent review of the field can be found in the focus issue that the *Modern Language Journal* (2012) has devoted to the evolution of LSP over the past 20 years, looking at different aspects, such as contexts in which LSP is taught, specialized discourse, curriculum and assessment issues, the role of the teacher, the expansion of LSP research, and the applications of technology.

It is this context of consolidation of LSP that marks the 20 years of AELFE (*Asociación Europea de Lenguas para Fines Específicos* / European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes), and this special issue of *Ibérica* is devoted to the celebration of our anniversary. Twenty years of intense activity and profound changes are difficult to summarize, but this issue of *Ibérica* reviews some of the main trends that have shaped the evolution of the field and intends to open up debates for the coming future. This combination of invited anniversary notes by recognized scholars and regular articles by active LSP researchers reflects the evolution of LSP and its good health, with a look to the future.

LSP teachers and researchers are characterized by being creative, innovative, and flexible (Swales, 1985; Robinson, 1991), usually working in collaboration within an interdisciplinary and complex field, which involves greater specialization, interaction with multiple audiences and increasing academic

development and requirements (see for instance Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; or Räisänen, 2009). Nowadays, new important demands are made on LSP specialists, calling for increased connections and networking among colleagues, especially through the use of academic forums for the exchange of ideas, such as conferences, journals, and electronic media. Academic associations such as AELFE provide a stimulus and a meeting point for setting up and reinforcing these connections. We are proud to celebrate our 20th anniversary, which means that the growing number of academics that make up the AELFE community believe in the aims of this Association, making it meaningful and contributing to the expansion and visibility of our work in LSP.

Since its foundation in 1992, the Association has worked towards the promotion of LSP teaching and research. AELFE originally started as the “Spanish Association of Languages for Specific Purposes”, created by an active group of LSP teachers who foresaw the need for an academic network to engage teachers and researchers of different languages in sharing, developing, and discussing their input, materials, and ideas on the field. From its very origins, AELFE has been characterized by being multilingual and multidisciplinary, reflecting the diversity of LSP. The new millennium heralded the transformation of AELFE into a European association, as globalization movements, together with greater political, social and academic convergence in Europe, posed new challenges for LSP teaching and research. Drawing on the tradition of Portuguese-Spanish LSP conferences, the first international AELFE conference was held in 2002, around the central topic of LSP in the knowledge society. The AELFE conference and the scientific journal *Ibérica* have become the main pillars of our Association, to help LSP specialists exchange ideas and research results, thus strengthening this academic network and making our contribution to the discipline.

Over the past decade, the annual conference of AELFE has provided a forum for delving into a myriad of issues in languages for specific purposes, covering different languages, teaching situations, and approaches, in a rapidly-changing context that has urged LSP teachers and researchers to respond to the demands of a society characterized by the spread of intercultural and multilingual interactions in academic and professional situations. AELFE conferences have allowed LSP scholars to meet every autumn to discuss and reflect on current challenges in LSP. AELFE conferences have been held in different locations in Spain and Portugal

(reflecting the origins of the Association), but it was also recently held in Germany and future venues are planned in other European countries, as the international dimension of our Association grows. Each conference has approached LSP from a central theme, varying from year to year. Central conference themes have included LSP in multilingual and multicultural societies, the genres and rhetoric of current specialized communication, LSP in the harmonization of European higher education, globalization phenomena and business communication, as well as the interplay between technology and LSP.

Ibérica has become the flagship of AELFE. This journal started in 1996 and regular yearly issues were published as from 1999. In 2003, it became a biannual publication. Over the years, *Ibérica* has evolved towards becoming a leading publication in LSP, open access for a worldwide audience, and widely referenced and indexed in prestigious lists such as Arts and Humanities Citation Index®, European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH), Journal Citation Reports/Social Sciences Edition, SCOPUS, Social Sciences Citation Index®, and Social Scisearch®. It was recently (2011) distinguished as “excellent scientific journal” by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation. The broad scope of LSP research published in *Ibérica* reflects the multifaceted and multilingual nature of our field, with articles focusing on (and written in) different languages, relating to a variety of disciplines. Browsing through the different issues, we can find state-of-the-art articles written by recognized scholars as well as insightful research into some of the most relevant current issues in LSP, such as specialized pedagogy, genre and discourse studies, terminology and translation, pragmatics, business and academic discourse, and sociolinguistics, among others. Monographic issues have addressed the applications of technology in LSP, metaphors and cognitive linguistics in LSP, as well as the use of English as an academic lingua franca. A future issue will be devoted to intercultural business communication. All in all, the evolution of *Ibérica* over the years reflects some of the main concerns that are relevant to LSP, providing a stimulating forum for disseminating research.

Also in relation to the aim of promoting and distinguishing high-quality research within LSP, AELFE has recently set up the “Enrique Alcaraz research award”, which pays tribute to a pioneering figure of LSP in Spain; a leading scholar that was internationally acknowledged, Enrique Alcaraz was a mentor to many LSP scholars and actively contributed to

AELFE, its conferences, and the international advisory board of its journal. Since 2010, this research award has been granted to publications that have made an important contribution to the field. The research award, the annual conference, and the journal increase the visibility of the academic work done in LSP, according to the aims of the Association, to foster and support LSP teaching and research.

With their contributions to this academic network, and thus to the development of LSP, members are the most important asset of the Association. Over these 20 years AELFE has evolved to keep pace with current trends and challenges, from its origins as a small group of teachers that perceived the need for academic connections in LSP to the growing network that we have today, in an international, multilingual, and interdisciplinary Association. The evolution of AELFE has been possible by its active members and the executive committees that have led the Association over the years, with Marinela García and Santiago Posteguillo as former presidents. Now that we look back on these 20 years of development of LSP that we have witnessed through AELFE, we realize the wealth of conference papers and journal articles that attest this intense LSP activity. Special acknowledgment should go to conference organizers and the scientific committees, as well as to the different Editors of *Ibérica* over the years, Margaret McGinity, Jordi Piqué, and Ana Bocanegra, who, aided by Editorial and International advisory boards have worked hard towards the high quality and visibility of our journal, raising it to the most prestigious databases and index lists.

This special issue of *Ibérica* is dedicated to celebrating these 20 years, with a look to the past, the present, and especially to the future. The inspiring overview provided by the recognized LSP scholars that have contributed to this issue is a signal of the good health of our field, with lively debates that respond to emerging needs and challenges as LSP scholars engage in teaching and researching academic and professional communication. In this celebration year, from AELFE we invite fellow scholars to contribute to our network, to strengthen academic and professional links, and to pave the way for the future of the field. In our 20th anniversary, it is time to “look back and look forward” (borrowing Upton’s (2012) words). Looking back, we can observe the efforts done over the years to consolidate and expand LSP teaching programs, and the increasing body of research disseminated through AELFE conferences and the *Ibérica* journal. And we look forward “with the lights on” (Hyland, this issue) to the challenges that lie ahead,

“looking for common ground” (Skelton & Whetstone, this issue) between language and fields of expertise, and trying to learn from the LSP experience “what these past 20 years can suggest about the next” (Scott, this issue). Many of such challenges are highlighted and discussed in the invited contributions to this volume, but there are others such as the use of English as a lingua franca – together with the expansion of multilingual settings – or the pervasive influence of information and communication technologies, which will prove to be relevant enough in our mission to help learners to communicate effectively as successful participants in their academic and professional communities. Within the growing AELFE community, LSP teachers and researchers will contribute to enhance the discipline through the Association’s conference and journal, will recognize and promote high-quality research through the recently established “Enrique Alcaraz research award”, and will assist in building bridges of cooperation among similar Associations across Europe and beyond.

From a European perspective and with an international, multilingual, multidisciplinary dimension, our association is open to all of our colleagues working in the field of languages for specific purposes, *lenguas para fines específicos* (or *lenguas profesionales y académicas*, to use Alcaraz’s (2000) preferred term), *línguas para fins específicos*, *langues de spécialité*, or *Fachsprachen*. Our mission as AELFE is to promote and support new initiatives and events proposed by members, to maintain and develop the conference, journal and research award for the dissemination of LSP research, and to deploy networks that can facilitate the collaboration of scholars to respond to the challenges of LSP in a globalized society. In other words, our mission is to provide, as we have been doing so far, an inspiring environment for the further advancement of LSP.

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