

Approaches to Specialised Discourse in Higher Education and Professional Contexts

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Approaches to Specialised Discourse in Higher Education and Professional Contexts is a collection of selected papers originally presented at the fourth AELFE (European Association of Languages for Specific Purposes) conference held in Cáceres (Spain) in 2005. As the editors indicate in the preface, this collection of papers aims to present current research related to the study and use of specialised discourse in academic and professional contexts. The collection itself is divided into four main parts: “Metaphor and Specialised Discourse”, “Tourism and Specialised Communication”, “Information Technologies and Specific Communicative Purposes”, and “The European Framework and Specialised Discourse Study”.

In his introduction to the book, MARTIN HEWINGS (University of Birmingham, UK) highlights the numerous features which make this collection of papers especially useful and interesting for researchers and practitioners of Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), working in different national contexts around the globe. One is the broad range of specialisms covered: not only business, electronics and telecommunications, tourism, workplace communication and engineering, but also culture and literature. Another highly positive feature of this collection is that the research methods presented, even though designed for the different research projects described therein, can be easily transferred to other LSP settings. Finally, responses to changes in society, for instance, technological advances in communication systems or the transformation of the European Higher Educational Area (EHEA), are also reflected in many of the research projects included in the collection.

The first part of the book features two papers, dealing with the use of metaphor in specialised discourse. Its inclusion in this collection is evidence of the impressive growth of applied metaphor research in recent years. PEDRO A. FUERTES OLIVERA (University of Valladolid, Spain) claims that

many economic and business dictionaries do not take into account the metaphorical senses of certain farming verbs used to express the concept of growth, found in a sample of business discourse. This author makes two extremely helpful suggestions for a better design of specialist dictionaries: the inclusion of the literal and metaphorical senses of a term, and the use of meaning devices, such as cross-referencing of metaphorical terms to the corresponding conceptual metaphor in order to render the semantic relationships of the metaphorical terms explicit. GEORGINA CUADRADO ESCLAPEZ and MARÍA DEL MAR DUQUE GARCÍA (Polytechnic University of Madrid, Spain) describe a methodologically distinct study of metaphors in the discourse of electronics and telecommunications. What is most remarkable about their contribution is the etymological analysis carried out for a number of specialist terms used in the field. Thus, the reader is offered the opportunity to trace the original literal sense of a term and then its transfer to the field of electronics and telecommunications with a new meaning.

The second part of the book includes three papers, focusing on tourism and specialised communication. The first, written by ALICIA MARTÍNEZ-FLORES and ESTHER USÓ-JUAN (Jaume I University, Castelló, Spain), describes an instructional framework for the development of students' competence in the use of pragmatically-appropriate suggestions in customer service situations in tourism. Grounded in a solid theoretical background, a classroom task methodology for oral and written practice is illustrated with generous examples of highly-motivating activities, which could be readily used in a class of English for tourism. GUADALUPE ACEDO DOMÍNGUEZ (Don Benito School of Languages, Spain), reports on a linguistic audit conducted in Spanish subsidiaries of multinational companies which served in the design of a realistic syllabus suited to students' linguistic needs in their future workplace. The follow-up phase, which consisted in corroborating the usefulness of the information obtained through the linguistic audit, proved especially valuable as it showed that this type of syllabus design methodology increases students' motivation and is highly effective in identifying their learning objectives. Finally, ALEJANDRO CURADO FUERTES and PATRICIA EDWARDS ROKOWSKI (University of Extremadura, Spain) relate details of an experimental study conducted with students of English for tourism. Their results indicate that computer-assisted reading comprehension exercises rather than traditional reading exercises on paper enabled students to be more effective readers. In addition, other skills used in the computerised environment, for instance, autonomous and team work,

influenced the results obtained. Finally, especially attractive are the proposed activities in which students can explore an electronic corpus of advertising texts.

The third part of the collection includes three reports of in-depth research conducted within multi-disciplinary teams. These projects led the way for the appropriate design of different computer-based supports for the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). First, CARMEN BENAVIDES CUÉLLAR, PETRA DÍAZ PRIETO, VERONICA COLWELL O'CALLAGHAN, ISAÍAS GARCÍA RODRÍGUEZ and HÉCTOR ALÁIZ MORETÓN (University of León, Spain) explain the implementation of a highly successful e-platform for students of English for electrical and mechanical engineering (INELMEC), which in its initial phase concentrated on the development of reading and writing, as well as grammar and technical vocabulary. The INELMEC platform is especially interesting because it is entirely teacher-friendly in the sense that anyone, regardless of their technical skills and knowledge, can manage the contents of this on-line course. The platform also ensures an active teacher-student involvement by means of chats and forums, and offers access to a wealth of web site resources. In the second paper, PANAGIOTIS ARVANTIS and PANAGIOTIS PANAGIOTIDIS (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece) describe an e-platform for the learning of French language and literature, originally designed for an unlimited number of courses made up of learning objects. The use of this e-platform in the teaching context described proves remarkably practical as it enhances students' technical literacy and enables them to handle different types of multimedia environments in their future professions. Finally, MERCEDES RICO GARCÍA, JUAN ENRIQUE AGUDO GARZÓN and ALEJANDRO CURADO FUERTES (University of Extremadura, Spain) detail a multi-disciplinary project (SHAIEEX) in which the carefully-planned and conducted research phase described allowed for the design of an Adaptive Hypermedia System for the teaching and learning of English. What seems most valuable about this system is that it combines multimedia, hyperspace and full adaptability, which means a highly flexible and motivating environment in which students may work at their own pace. The authors' special effort to include transversal knowledge, such as awareness-raising activities about diversity, family values or friendship should also be acknowledged here as the system was designed for pre-school children aged from three to five.

PILAR DURÁN ESCRIBANO and JOANA PIERCE MCMAHON (Polytechnic University of Madrid, Spain) contributed the final paper for the collection, a

report on a project to adapt the European Framework of Reference for Languages to the academic and professional language needs of Spanish technical university students. The authors use the concept of the European Language Portfolio, which aims to develop learner autonomy, to initiate the analysis and discussion of the language competence descriptors appropriate for technical university students' language biography. In addition to a detailed description of the levels of reference for scientific and technical English courses, the authors offer an in-depth account of the contents and objectives for academic and scientific-technical language portfolios. This final paper convincingly connects the present with the future of EFL teaching and learning and is highly relevant for all language instructors in the future European Higher Education Area.

The collection reviewed here should be recommended to anyone interested in the current research and practice within the field of specialised discourse analysis and its application in professional and academic contexts. However, it seems unbalanced in two ways. First, the last section dealing with the European framework and specialised discourse study includes only one paper, which is disappointing in light of the considerable changes that currently characterize the European Higher Education. Second, the editors recall the European dimension of the AELFE conference in the preface; however, this is not reflected in the selection of papers: all but one are written by researchers of Spanish universities and describe projects responding to the needs of Spanish learners. Furthermore, specialised discourse in higher education and professional contexts, which is the scope of the collection mentioned in the title, is disappointingly limited to discourse in English, as only one paper reports on a project related to the French language. Research focusing on other European languages, such as French and German used in many specialist fields of study could have enriched the selection of papers in this collection. In spite of the drawbacks mentioned, details of different research procedures described are impressive and the papers included in the collection will undoubtedly become a point of reference in the field of LSP teaching and learning.

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