English for Specific Purposes: Studies for Classroom Development and Implementation

Ana Bocanegra Valle, Mª del Carmen Lario de Oñate & Elena López Torres (eds).

After the Second World War, the switch from German to English as the dominant instrumental *lingua franca* of science, technology and business began to take place. In the 1960s, the spread of English as the new global language in the academic and professional world became an accomplished fact. The publication of two groundbreaking articles by Barber (1962) and Herbert (1965), respectively, is thought to have contributed greatly to the emergence of a new discipline: *English for Specific Purposes* (ESP). By the late 1980s, the discipline of ESP was consolidated, as shown in Hutchinson and Waters (1987). Today, in the Information Society, the field of research into specialized languages seems, more than ever before, to be enjoying a boom, since it has been widely recognized that language plays an essential role in the modernization of society and knowledge.

English for Specific Purposes: Studies for Classroom Development and Implementation, edited by Bocanegra Valle, Lario de Oñate and López Torres, is indeed a remarkable example of the applied linguistic research into the teaching of specialized languages that is currently being done in Spanish academic circles. The book stems from the ESP research group at the University of Cádiz (Spain), and offers a panoramic view of the research done in other Spanish universities. The volume begins with a preface in which the editors prepare the ground for a better understanding of the major contributions of the book regarding ESP studies for effective teaching and learning. Summarizing the most relevant contributions of this volume, the following aspects may be highlighted:

(1) Developing cultural awareness in the teaching of ESP

The increasing importance of developing cultural awareness in the teaching of ESP is addressed in Part I of the volume. More specifically, LARIO DE OÑATE (pages 11-31) provides an exhaustive analysis of a corpus of 65 business English textbooks, from 1963 to 2006. Her survey reveals significant

changes between past and present trends in the writing of business English textbooks. For instance, nowadays, business textbooks tend to be more visually appealing, draw on authentic business English texts, are more interactive in their approach to teaching the language and communication skills, have incorporated the use of new technologies, and promote cultural awareness to a great extent. On the basis that the law, like language, is a cultural product, ORTS LLOPIS (pages 33-51) affirms the need to explain legal English and legal Spanish to lawyers in terms of two cultural traditions, i.e. common law and civil law, and therefore provides an in-depth analysis of the intercultural differences between Anglo-American law and Spanish law from four perspectives, namely legal discourse, epistemological traditions, trends of thought, and anthropological culture, with special reference to Hall's value dimensions of context and space.

(2) Teaching specialized vocabulary

Specialized vocabulary has always been a key issue in the teaching of ESP, so it is not surprising that three chapters of the volume are devoted to this topic. PEREA BARBERÁ (pages 53-72) puts forward a taxonomy of 57 vocabulary learning strategies (VLS) for the purpose of designing a questionnaire, the ultimate aim of which is to obtain data, from both a synchronic and a diachronic point of view, on the strategies used by ESP students in the learning of specialized vocabulary. BOCANEGRA VALLE (pages 73-93), for her part, presents her research in progress regarding the learning strategies of nominal compounds as used by a reduced sample of thirty-nine second-year Spanish students of Marine Engineering at the University of Cádiz (Spain). Findings from this survey show that, on the one hand, context proves to be the most useful tool for hypothesis testing and disambiguation, and on the other hand, instruction is not decisive in solving the problems posed by noun compounding in English to Spanish students. Although nowadays Spanish nursing graduates, thanks to their excellent qualifications, have the opportunity of being recruited by the National Health Service in the UK, more often than not they have to overcome serious language and cultural barriers, because of their lack of proficiency in the English language. In this regard, BOTELLA RODRÍGUEZ (pages 95-104) reviews vocabulary learning strategies thoroughly, and suggests various types of activities for the purpose of developing specialized lexical competence in medical/nursing English.

(3) The professional genre as a pedagogical tool for developing writing skills in ESP

In *English for Specific Purposes: Studies for Classroom Development and Implementation*, the reader also finds some chapters focusing on the professional genre as a pedagogical tool for developing writing skills in English for specialized purposes. To illustrate this line of applied research, let us consider, for instance, the contribution by DURÁN ESCRIBANO and CUADRADO ESCLÁPEZ (pages 105-123) who present a full description of the procedure followed by the research group DISCYT to develop the writing descriptors in the Academic and Professional European Language Portfolio (ACPEL). BOSCH ABARCA and MONTAÑÉS BRUNET (pages 125-147) offer an outstanding analysis of the problems faced by Spanish students when writing business English texts, and suggest an interesting approach for effective business writing based on developing: (a) discourse competence (knowledge of professional genres), (b) interactive competence (understanding writing as social and communicative engagement), (c) strategic competence (knowing how to promote involvement or detachment in a written text), and (d) sociolinguistic competence (knowing which register is appropriate in a particular communicative situation). PALMER-SILVEIRA and RUIZ-GARRIDO (pages 149-171) draw the reader's attention to a specific written genre of business communication: the corporate annual report. Firstly, the authors provide an interesting survey of the complex embedded macrostructure of the corporate annual report, which includes a wide range of text-types and graphs. And secondly, they present a systematic didactic exploitation of all the linguistic resources provided in the corporate annual report, namely describing graphs, writing business letters, and the strategic use of the language of persuasion for marketing purposes.

(4) Teaching ESP through specialized corpora

The advantages of using specialized corpora in the ESP classroom are also discussed in detail in the volume by CURADO FUENTES (pages 173-192) and LÓPEZ TORRES (pages 193-212). The former examines the degree of effectiveness that a number of activities based on specific academic English corpus material may entail for improving non-native English graduate writing. And the latter explores a small corpus of maritime law, and lays the ground for a corpus-aided learning of the language of maritime legislation.

(5) Teaching ESP through the Internet and Information Technologies (ITs)

The last two chapters in this book are devoted to the use and application of the Internet and ITs. Whereas LÓPEZ DE VERGARA M. (pages 213-227)

analyzes the teaching advantages of using the Internet as an integrative language learning resource to promote autonomous learning, FERNÁNDEZ MORALES and HEWITT (pages 229-248) present the design and creation of a CD-ROM with twelve thematic units for social work students, including a wide range of sections, such as Reading technique, Pre-reading tasks, Vocabulary, Reading, Discourse order, Grammar review, and General index.

On closer examination, I think that *English for Professional and Academic Purposes* would have been a more appropriate, up-to-date title for this book. Alcaraz Varó (2000) argues in favour of the name "English for Professional and Academic Purposes", rather than "English for Specific Purposes", on the grounds that any use we may make of language will always be specific, because it always serves a purpose. I also find the division of the book into five different parts somewhat confusing because although these are specified in the index and in the preface, they are not explicitly indicated in the text. In addition, the heading given to Part I, "Setting the context", seems slightly vague and opaque, since the only thing that chapters one and two have in common is cultural awareness as an emergent concern in Business English and Legal English teaching.

All things considered, in my view this is a helpful and valuable book for both the researcher in Applied Linguistics and the lecturer in English for Professional and Academic Purposes. It does indeed chart the terrain for further applied research into the teaching of specialized English, and prepares the ground for both cultural awareness and autonomous learning, two major concerns in the European Space of Higher Education.

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