



Current Trends in LSP Research: Aims and Methods

Margrethe Petersen, Jan Engberg (eds).

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Languages for Specific Languages (LSP) represent a dynamic approach both in research and practice and, as such, it is in constant evolution. It was earlier related to the use of English as an international language of communication in business and technology and thus designated as ESP (English for Specific Purposes). In *Genre Analysis*, Swales (1990) brought in new horizons with the notions of genre and discourse community. Thereafter, research on LSP learning and discourse have thrived over a large range of thematic contents and methods.

Current Trends in LSP Research: Aims and Methods can be inserted in this latest streak. The editors Margrethe Petersen and Jan Engberg have selected papers that explore new lines in research methods or aims and accordingly are well prepared to meet possible professional challenges. These papers were presented at the 17th European Symposium on LSP held in Aarhus (Denmark) in August 2009. The volume is structured in an introduction explaining the scope and goals of the book and a prologue. They are followed by nine chapters distributed into three sections. In their introduction, the editors go through LSP development during the last decades and focus on the work of Swales and Bhatia and the sociological dimension of genre analysis. They consider the gradual shift of LSP studies towards professional and specialised knowledge in aims and methods, mainly due to interdisciplinary influence.

KLAUS SCHUBERT in the prologue entitled “Specialized communication studies: an expanding discipline” argues for the integration of Translation and Interpreting Studies with LSP Studies under the label of “Specialized Communication Studies”. Drawing mostly from German literature, Schubert sums up the development of LSP and also of translation and interpreting studies finding overlapping areas in them. He concludes that both pursue what he calls “optimized communication”. Accordingly, the new discipline would require a prescriptive focus and a solid basis.

The first section of the book, “Methods” includes chapters that resort to “methods not widely used in the field” (page 11). In the first chapter, “‘If money isn’t loosened up, this sucker could go down’: how top politicians talk about financial crises”, RICHARD J. ALEXANDER embarks upon a study of the speeches uttered by three top Anglo-American politicians at the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008 to investigate the discourse strategies used to reassure audiences and to justify policies. Specifically, he examines the use of personal and possessive pronouns, tense choices, agency, metaphor use and euphemisms.

The second contribution by INGER ASKEHAVE and LISE-LOTTE HOLMGREE, “Cultural awareness in a corporate context: what constructions of ‘culture’ may reveal”, takes up a social–constructivist approach to measure different levels of cultural awareness and sensitivity to other cultures in the professional area.

The next chapter by TRINE DHAL, “The ideal informant: on the use of subject specialists in analyses of LSP texts”, discusses the suitability of asking experts and their role to give feedback on LSP texts, for instance on rhetorical text features in different sections of research articles. Dhal outlines a series of methods to recruit reliable informants and highlights the influence of context since the use of rhetorical elements may fluctuate according to discipline.

Section two contains papers that apply methods “not traditionally employed in the research into specialized professional communication” (page 12). The first chapter by AZIRAH HASHIM and RICHARD POWELL, “Exploring language choices in Malaysian trials and arbitrations: common aims, complementary methods”, addresses the multicultural and multilingual sides of language choice in Malaysian trials and arbitrations. Drawing on direct observations and interview data, Hasim and Powell compare language choice in the settings of courtroom trials and arbitral tribunals by describing shifts of style and register, or language code-switching.

BEYZA BJÖRKMAN, in “Investigating English as a Lingua Franca in applied science education: aims, methods, findings and implications”, comments the appropriateness of a variety of methods for the study of spoken English as a lingua franca in engineering higher education in Sweden. Björkman examined a corpus through digital recordings and observations in the classroom, and by means of quantitative and qualitative analyses concluded that function prevails over accuracy in this specific setting.

In the third chapter, “Towards a methodological framework for knowledge communication”, MARIANNE GROVE DITLEVSEN proposes the adoption of a multi-dimensional model for knowledge communication. This model would involve a holistic perspective encompassing the analysis of text as communication, the relations of text and knowledge, and text and context. Knowledge communication, she concludes, should be understood as interaction, and as goal oriented.

In the next paper, SIMONA SANGIORGI in “The ‘as if game’ of textual hyperreality: a case study” completes a sociological intercultural analysis of the discourse used in a collection of advertisements of American and European theme parks. Sangiorgi applies notions of Critical Discourse Analysis to shed light on “textual seduction” and to encourage critical skills. The results reveal textual strategies underpinning a game between fiction (“as if”) and reality.

The last section of the book contains two chapters “from the point of view of a different discipline” (page 14). In “Expanding the boundaries of LSP research: using intercultural experiments to examine the effect of visual representations in text comprehension and retention”, MARTIN J. EPPLER, SABRINA BRESCIANI, MARGARET TAN and KLARISSA CHAN explore the advantages of visual representations in business communication. The authors conduct an intercultural experiment with European and East Asian students to show that despite not being well considered in the professional or the academic settings, visual means can develop understanding and recall in specific contexts.

FRANK C. KEIL in “The problem of partial understanding” analyses the cognitive abilities that enable non-experts to complete gaps of understanding and to understand a variety of abstract patterns. Keil also discusses about the generalized illusion of having better explanatory abilities and on how deference to experts could be used to get a deeper knowledge of complex phenomena. He argues about the convenience for LSP to gain insights from the study of mental models.

Finally, CHRISTOPHER CANDLIN and JONATHAN CRICHTON with “Emergent themes and research challenges: reconceptualising LSP” appear as the epilogue to the book. Ways in which discursive practice interacts with professional practice are examined. Likewise, the advantages of the association between applied linguists and subject matter specialists and professionals are described. Candlin and Crichton enunciate ways to enhance

this cooperation, for example, by looking at how professionals develop their activities and their dynamic interaction with discourse (“focus on practice”) or by considering topical professional themes and macro themes such as “quality, expertise or creativity” (“focus on themes”).

On the whole, I recommend reading “Current trends in LSP research: Aims and Methods” as a rewarding activity not only for the LSP practitioner or for the applied linguistic scholar but also for professionals of any field engaged in communication and the transmission of specialized knowledge.

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References

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