

# Specificity in LSP

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## Abstract

The defining feature of our field is the teaching and use of language for specific purposes. Not surprisingly, this has led to a debate over just how specific those purposes should be. The debate is longstanding, stirred initially by Hutchinson and Waters' classic 1980 article, 'ESP at the Crossroads' and reinvigorated most recently by Hyland (2002), who argues that the field has drifted away from specificity, becoming too generalized and diffuse. This paper lays out the arguments on both sides and then stakes out a position that draws from each of them. While agreeing with some of Hyland's criticisms of the 'wide-angle' position (for example, that generalized LSP can fail to appreciate the distinct linguistic and rhetorical features of specialized discourses), the paper criticizes his 'narrow-angle' position as well by pointing out that it can easily lead to a teacher-centered prescriptivism and to an overly rigid focus on certain forms and tasks at the expense of others. Furthermore, such an approach fails to prepare students for the unpredictable new forms of communication that await them in their professional careers. In general, a teacher-centered approach, no matter how specific, is unlikely to have the pedagogical effectiveness of a student-centered approach, especially in heterogeneous classes. Specificity, it is argued, must ultimately be supplied by the student, not by the teacher, for it is the student more than the LSP teacher who is in the process of becoming an insider and whose interests are best served by becoming an astute analyst of the specialist discourse. The teacher's role should be that of facilitator, instructing students in analytic strategies, both rhetorical and textual. The paper concludes with a number of illustrations in how this can be done, drawing especially on work in genre study.

**Key Words:** Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP), specificity.

## Resumen

La característica que define nuestro campo es la enseñanza y el uso de la lengua para fines específicos (LFE). No sorprende que esto haya conducido al debate de cómo deberían ser de específicos esos fines. El tema lleva tiempo debatiéndose, iniciado por Hutchinson y Waters en su ya artículo clásico de 1980, "ESP at the Crossroads", y recientemente revigorizado por Hyland (2002), afirmando que el campo se ha desviado de la especificidad hacia un concepto generalizador y difuso. En este artículo se exponen los argumentos de ambos lados y se propone una posición que se nutre de ambos. Al propio tiempo que estamos de acuerdo con la crítica de Hyland referente a una posición "amplia" (por ejemplo, que un concepto generalizador de la lengua para fines específicos puede no distinguir las características lingüísticas y retóricas concretas del discurso específico), en este artículo también se critica su posición "restrictiva" señalando que fácilmente puede conducir a un prescriptivismo centrado en el profesor y a un enfoque excesivamente rígido sobre ciertas formas y tareas en detrimento de otras. Además, tal enfoque no consigue preparar a los estudiantes en las nuevas formas impredecibles de la comunicación que les espera en sus carreras profesionales. En general, un enfoque centrado en el profesor, independientemente de lo específico que sea, con toda probabilidad no tendrá la eficacia pedagógica de un enfoque centrado en el estudiante, especialmente en grupos heterogéneos. Se argumenta, asimismo, que la especificidad debe en último término ser suministrada por el alumno, no por el profesor, ya que es el *estudiante*, más que el profesor de LFE, quien está en el proceso de convertirse en la persona experta y cuyos intereses son mejor servidos convirtiéndose en un analista inteligente del discurso especializado. El papel del profesor debe ser el de facilitador, instruyendo a los alumnos en estrategias analíticas, tanto retóricas como textuales. Concluimos el artículo con una serie de ejemplos sobre cómo puede esto llevarse a cabo, especialmente mediante trabajo realizado sobre estudios de género.

**Palabras Clave:** lenguas para fines específicos (LFE), especificidad

## The Centrality of Specificity

From the beginning, the primary *raison d'être* for LSP –what sets it apart from general language study– has been its focus on specific, purposeful uses of language. Not language

for its own sake, but rather particular uses of it for particular ends. The language learner is assumed to be studying a language for a certain practical need; the curriculum designer uses needs analysis to determine what particular features of the target language should be taught; and the language teacher then focuses on those features. Hence, from the inception of the field in the early 60's until now, LSP research and teaching have consistently revolved around specific kinds of language use –the language of plant biology, the language of air traffic control, even the language of making box kites.

But how specific should LSP specificity be? There have always been two opposing forces at play in answering this question: the desire to tailor instruction to the needs of the individual student vs. the imperative to find a common ground among all the students in the class. Ideally, LSP teaching should be based on subject-matter content that is recognizably part of the student's own discipline or in any case something the student knows that he or she needs to learn. This gives it *face validity* in the eyes of the student and is likely to increase the motivation to learn. The most successful LSP teaching experience I have ever had involved a class of one student. He was a Spanish doctor who was trying to get his license to practice medicine in the US. Despite many years of professional experience, he was having trouble passing the US exam, simply because part of the exam consisted of an idiotic test of archaic academic English. He had already taken and failed the test twice; if he failed it a third time, he would have had to leave the country. To say that this student was highly motivated to learn this form of LSP, namely the grammar of medical license exams, is to state the obvious. And all I had to do was teach to the test, that is, teach him the archaic forms that I had studied in school myself but hardly ever used. I'm pleased to report that he passed with flying colors.

This is an extreme example of what is sometimes called 'narrow angle' LSP. Narrow-angle LSP is appropriate not only with single students like this but with any homogeneous group of students. For example, a class of Brazilians learning the language of air-traffic control or a class of French Canadian banking interns learning the discourse of customer service would probably do best with a narrow-angle approach. So long as there is a homogeneous group of students and a clearly defined discourse to be learned, it's pedagogically most effective to teach that discourse directly.

But most LSP classes, in my experience, lack that kind of uniformity and focus. Rather, they are more often composed of students from different disciplines and/or

language backgrounds with different purposes for taking the class. And in such cases, the instructor cannot afford to spend a lot of class time focusing on the interests of individual students but must instead concentrate on topics of more general relevance. This more general type of pedagogy is called ‘wide angle’ LSP. The problem is that, as the angle gets wider and wider, it risks losing specificity and therefore face validity for any one individual student in the class.

## The ‘wide-angle’ revolution

This dilemma has always been a part of LSP. That’s why Waters and Hutchinson’s classic 1980 article, “ESP at the Crossroads,” drew the attention it did. In that article, Waters and Hutchinson argued that what we should all be teaching is not the surface aspects of specialized discourse but the *general linguistic competence* that underlies such learning, regardless of the field of study. They illustrate this point as follows:

Consider the example of the native speaker student entering a British technical college to study, say, Electrical Engineering. He will have had no previous experience of studying the subject, since it is not part of an English school curriculum, and cannot be assumed to have any knowledge of either the subject itself, or the specific terms associated with it. Yet, assuming he is reasonably intelligent and attentive, he will be able to cope adequately with the flow of new information. It would also be reasonable to assume that if he had been enrolled instead for a different subject—technical or otherwise—he would also have been able to cope... How is this possible, unless there is a basic Underlying Competence that, largely irrespective of subject, enables the student to interpret the flow of new knowledge? In fact, this Competence is fundamental to the whole teaching-learning process, because it is the starting point for the interaction of teacher and student in the transfer of knowledge. (Hutchinson & Swales, 1985: 178)

The Waters-Hutchinson paper laid out the main argument for wide-angle LSP. The teaching of specialized discourse, they argue, should be left to those who know it best, the specialist instructors of particular disciplines. Meanwhile, we LSP teachers should occupy ourselves with the teaching of more general linguistic skills, what they call the “Underlying Competence” that every student needs.

In a recent paper (Hyland, 2002), Ken Hyland claims that this sort of generalized LSP ‘has crept into our current thinking and practices’ and is gaining ground in many university language-teaching programs. We talk about ‘academic discourse’, or ‘business

writing’, or ‘professional communication’ as if these were undifferentiated wholes, when in actual practice (that is, in the workplace, not the classroom) these broad categorizations break down into innumerable subtypes, each of which is further refined according to specific, local situational variables

Hyland lists four reasons commonly given for this drift away from specificity. First, it is argued that narrow-angle LSP is too hard for students with lower levels of language proficiency, who first need to master general-purpose language. Second, the research required for narrow-angle LSP is too costly in this age of tightening budgets. Third, LSP in the narrow sense can only be taught by subject-matter specialists, not by language teachers. And finally, and most important, there are generic language and discourse features that occur across disciplines, obviating the need to focus exclusively on any particular discipline

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- Narrow-angle LSP is too hard for lower-level students
  - Narrow-angle LSP research is too expensive
  - Narrow-angle LSP can only be taught by knowledgeable specialists
  - Many language and discourse features are generic, not subject-specific
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Figure 1. Claims made by ‘wide-angle’ advocates

## Hyland’s critique

Hyland challenges all four of these arguments. First, he claims that second language acquisition research shows that students do not necessarily learn best by learning general core features before more specialized ones but rather by attending to those features of language as they need them. Second, he implies that cost-effectiveness of research should be determined not just on the basis of cost but on the basis of effectiveness. If narrow-angle LSP is more effective than generalized ESP, the cost of doing narrow-angle LSP research needs to be judged accordingly. Third, he notes that subject-matter specialists typically do not have the linguistic expertise and the desire to serve as language teachers, thus leaving it up to real language teachers to do the job however well they can. And “we are now in a better position to describe the literacy cultures of different academic majors more precisely and with more confidence. This knowledge is related, moreover, to our professional responsibility to use these descriptions of target forms

and tasks to best assist our students” (p. 388). Finally, he argues that the notion of a common core of features found across disciplines overlooks the role of context in determining what features mean in actual use. The same feature can mean different things in different contexts. Hyland concludes by urging us to ‘put the S back into LSP,’ to return to the specificity that once marked our discipline.

## Assessment of Hyland

I agree with Hyland’s first two points but disagree with the last two. Even if LSP teaching cannot be turned over to subject-matter specialists, this does not mean that LSP teachers can jump in and provide narrow-angle expertise. Despite all the research of technical discourse that’s been done over the years by LSP scholars, it seldom happens, especially in mixed classes, that the LSP teacher has the disciplinary knowledge needed to provide reliably accurate instruction in technical varieties of language. And although context certainly affects the interpretation of linguistic and nonlinguistic features, this does not rule out the existence of a transdisciplinary common core of features. For example, although the use of hedging and metadiscourse may vary somewhat in frequency or form across disciplines, the basic meanings and functions of these discourse features remain the same.

In general, I’m not sure I share Hyland’s perception of a drift toward general-purpose LSP. An examination of articles in the field’s major journal, *ESPJ*, for example, reveals in fact a rather disappointing regularity of topics and approaches over the years. Genre studies and corpus studies have made an impact, certainly, but not in a way that contributes to any sort of drift toward general purpose LSP.

Still, I do think Hyland is right in calling for more specificity in LSP. LSP is successful to the extent that it is tailored to meet the needs of specific students in specific circumstances. Therefore, we should do as Hyland suggests and make our courses as specific as possible.

## Learner-centered LSP

But this begs some major questions: Whose specificity is it? Where does it come from? Who determines it? Perhaps most important of all, what do we mean by

‘specificity’ anyway? Hyland seems to be embracing the traditional *content*-based view whereby specificity is determined by the degree of technicality of the subject matter. Thus, a study of the use of pseudopassives in high energy astrophysics poster presentations is more specific than, say, a study of politeness in academic discourse. This is in keeping, of course, with the fact that LSP professionals are applied linguists whose training predisposes them to study the semiotic object rather than the learning subject. If the semiotic object, in this case a written text, is highly technical, i.e. has a narrow frame of reference, then such a study is ipso facto highly specific. At least that’s the traditional LSP way of seeing it.

But what if the *learner* is a first-year university student in the humanities who is struggling with the writing of ordinary academic essays? In that case, wouldn’t a study of academic politeness in academic discourse be more relevant and useful than a study of pseudopassives in high energy astrophysics poster presentations? And couldn’t we then say that such a study is more *specific* to that learner’s needs? What I’m suggesting is that *specificity should be defined not in terms of content per se but in terms of the learner and his or her needs*. If we look at specificity in this learner-centered way, we are aligning ourselves with Hutchinson and Waters and can see that teaching general skills and strategies (or ‘underlying competence’) may well be more ‘specific’ than teaching highly technical subject matter.

As with many LSP professionals, Hyland seems to have a vision of the LSP teacher as someone who takes on a group of students, identifies those students’ discourse communities and specific language needs, researches the discourse of those communities, and then prepares and delivers appropriate information about that discourse. In other words, the locus of control is entirely in the hands of the *instructor*. Note the agency in the concluding paragraph of Hyland’s paper:

ESP therefore involves developing new kinds of literacy, *equipping students* with the communicative skills to participate in particular academic and professional cultural contexts. Establishing exactly what are the specific language, skills, and genres of particular groups on which *we need to base learning priorities* may well be expensive, time consuming and skill-intensive. But it is this research which both makes our teaching effective and our practices professional, and *we should not give these up easily*. (Hyland, 2002, emphasis added)

Note that it is the *teacher* who is ‘equipping his or her students,’ the *teacher* who establishes learning priorities, the *teacher* who does not want to ‘give anything up easily.’ But if we look back at the four arguments for or against highly-specific LSP, we can see that in all four cases it may actually be the *student* who is best positioned to take control of his or her learning:

1. LSP students learn best by attending to those features of language as they need them. This of course can vary greatly from one student to another.
2. The cost-effectiveness of LSP research depends in part on its effectiveness. And students may be the best judge of this effectiveness.
3. LSP teachers seldom have the disciplinary knowledge needed to give students direct instruction in disciplinary discourse. This shortcoming can be overcome somewhat through the use of team-teaching, linked courses, etc. But inasmuch as the students themselves are developing insider knowledge as they pursue their disciplinary coursework, this knowledge should be put to use in the LSP classroom.
4. Whether there is a common core of features across disciplines or not, the meanings and uses of these features can vary from one context to another. And knowledge of the context (i.e., insider knowledge) is required to tease out these meanings and uses. Through their disciplinary coursework, students are in the process of developing this insider knowledge.

In all four cases, what stands out is the fact that the LSP student is in a better position than the LSP teacher to determine what his or her specific needs are. In other words, if LSP is to be as specific as Hyland recommends, it should be *learner-centered*, not teacher-centered. A teacher-centered pedagogy can too easily lead to an undesirable prescriptivism, to an overly rigid focus on certain forms and tasks at the expense of others. An overly prescriptive approach, I fear, will fail to prepare students for the unpredictable new forms of communication that await them in their professional careers.

## What about the LSP teacher?

This of course raises questions about the role of the LSP professional: In a learner-centered pedagogy, where should the LSP researcher/teacher put his or her energy?

What kind of classroom instruction should we be providing? What kind of research should we be doing?

In learner-centered LSP, the teacher should put his or her energy into empowerment of the learner. This should be the primary goal of all teaching, of course, but in a learner-centered pedagogy there is a special obligation to transfer the locus of control from the teacher to the learner sooner rather than later. If possible, the teacher should take on the role of coach or mentor more than that of a teacher.

## **Pedagogical implications**

Classroom instruction, therefore, should emphasize the teaching of *strategies* rather than linguistic forms, uses, and other surface aspects of communication. These strategies should include both metacognitive (learning) strategies and rhetorical strategies. For example, in the Technical Writing and Editing course I taught for many years at the Eindhoven Technological University (Netherlands), I had postgraduate students from a variety of technical disciplines. Beyond the shared goal of wanting to write good technical reports in English, there were normally significant differences among these students regarding their native language, their discipline, their level of English proficiency, their academic status, their purposes, their motivation, and so on. I dealt with this heterogeneity by having students work on their own projects and by making these projects the centerpiece of the course. I gave students instruction in technical writing basics and in techniques of peer evaluation; then I divided the class up into groups of three and had them workshop their peers' writing. In this way, the students were getting a lot of attention on their own writing but also learning about their peers' writing and how to evaluate it, making them sensitive to the fact of disciplinary difference in their own and others' writing. While I spent considerable class time lecturing on fine points of English style, grammar, genre conventions, and so on, I also talked about rhetorical strategies.

Another example of learner empowerment can be found in the Professional Writing course I've designed at the University of Utah, which enrolls about 2400 students a year. This course is very heterogeneous, consisting of undergraduate students from every technical or business-oriented major at the university. I am therefore obligated to take a wide-angle approach, giving basic instruction in audience analysis, document

design, style, etc. and in standard genres such as memos, reports, proposals, and business letters. Halfway through the course, however, we switch gears and have students go out into the community in teams of 3-4 to do writing projects for local nonprofit agencies. Working on their own, they have to contact an appropriate agency, meet with agency personnel, determine what kind of writing project is needed (for example, a grant proposal, brochures, a web site), and then design and carry out the project. In this real-life service learning, the students have to work together and do needs analysis, rhetorical analysis, and other forms of strategic thinking. When I first started this pedagogy back in 1994, I instinctively took too much control of it. But then I relaxed and gradually turned things more and more over to the students themselves. And if student evaluations are any indication, the more control they had the more they liked it. (See Huckin, 1997 for further details.)

## The role of research

What about research? First of all, let me distinguish between two kinds of research, local and published. *Local research* is that in which the LSP practitioner studies the type of communication that each of his or her students is expected to produce. It can include interviews with the student's professors, examination of student writing, analysis of model writing samples, etc. Local research of one kind or another is essential to the successful teaching of an LSP course, because it is a part of needs analysis. As for *published research*, it plays an odd role in our field. On the one hand, it typically represents careful, scholarly investigation of a particular aspect of special-purpose language use. On the other hand, the findings of such research are seldom generalizable to teaching situations beyond the one that inspired the research. Indeed, the very specificity of good local research weighs against its likelihood of being relevant to other contexts. For example, let me take one recently published article as representative of many:

This paper reports on an investigation into the workplace English needs of textile and clothing merchandisers who communicate in the international marketplace. Through questionnaire surveys, telephone interviews, analysis of authentic correspondence and visits to the workplace, a detailed understanding has been obtained of the communication demands placed on merchandisers working in this business environment. This in-depth knowledge has enabled the authors to develop teaching and learning materials that match the specific workplace needs. The types of

communication which differ markedly from those included in traditional business English courses are identified and discussed. (Li So-mui and Mead, 2000)

This study was done in Hong Kong, where the textile and clothing industry accounts for more than 36% of all manufacturing sector employees. It therefore is clearly relevant to LSP teaching in Hong Kong. But its relevance beyond Hong Kong or outside the textile and clothing industry seems questionable. Indeed, the authors' all-too-brief conclusion cannot hide their own reservations on this score:

This detailed investigation into the use of English in the workplace of textile and clothing merchandisers has enabled the course designers and the developers of teaching and learning materials to provide more specifically focused English courses. While this study has concentrated on the communication demands of the textile and clothing merchandiser, it is believed that merchandising in many other industries such as electronics, toys and watches would have very similar needs, and these are areas that would benefit from further study. It is hoped that the findings described above will be of value to course designers and teachers working with personnel who need to communicate *in a similar international environment.*" (Li So-mui and Mead, 2000; italics added)

Now what are the chances of finding "a similar international environment"? Not very high, it seems to me. And to the extent to which textile and clothing manufacturing in Hong Kong has its own unique nature, this study will be useful locally but will not be generalizable to other settings. I could cite many other studies in the LSP literature that underscore this same point.

Does this mean that LSP published research is of no value to LSP teachers around the world? Not at all. LSP teachers should be reading up on the literature to get *general* ideas about how best to *coach* their students. Not specific details to be transmitted in traditional top-down fashion, but general strategies to guide both the teacher's and the student's work. For example, in this Hong Kong case the specific findings of the study (such as the use of certain abbreviations in fax messages about textile manufacturing) would not likely be of use to a teacher of, say, computer science students in Norway. But an LSP teacher anywhere in the world might draw inspiration from the design of the study, about how to go about doing a multifaceted needs analysis: the kinds of questions used in the questionnaire, the kinds of observations made about workplace communication, etc. In short, the published LSP research, while not directly applicable to diverse LSP settings, can well serve to guide teachers' thinking into how best to serve their students' needs.

## Genre analysis

Let me now shift gears slightly and illustrate what I have said up to this point with reference to an area of specialization that I've been especially active in, Genre Analysis. Genre analysis, of course, has become the backbone of LSP over the past ten years or so. It dominates LSP published research and it dominates LSP textbooks. This attention is due in part to the fact that genre has just the right level of granularity between the study of sentence-level linguistic features and the study of broad notional forms of discourse such as “process description” or “classification.” In particular, each genre has an identifiable rhetorical purpose, which helps explain why genre analysis came into fashion at about the same time as communicative language teaching. A lab report has the rhetorical purpose of reporting the methodology and results of laboratory research; a job letter has the rhetorical purpose of applying for a job.

It's important to understand exactly what's meant by the term ‘rhetoric’ in this context. To my knowledge, the term was first introduced into the LSP literature by my old mentors at the University of Washington, Larry Selinker and Louis Trimble. In their classic 1972 paper, “Grammar and Technical English” (see Lackstrom et al.), they use the term ‘rhetoric’ according to Daniel Marder's definition, as follows:

In technical writing, rhetoric manifests itself in the techniques of organization and style that the writer employs. The organizational techniques are methods of solving various writing problems so that unity, coherence, and emphasis are maintained throughout the communications. These methods are used first to arrange the whole composition into related parts and then to arrange the parts for a total effect of clarity and forcefulness . . . Style is the application of rhetorical principles to the smallest element of the composition—the sentence. It is the writer's manner of selecting words and combining them into the sentences that constitute the paragraphs. The paragraphs in turn are organized according to some technique or combination of techniques to make up the entire composition. (Marder, 1960: 5-6)

This highly formalistic conception of rhetoric has been reinforced over the years in the subfield of Contrastive Rhetoric, initiated by Robert Kaplan's studies in the late '60s. In recent years, however, a much more dynamic conception of rhetoric has taken over, one that emphasizes *persuasive strategies* rather than textlinguistic structure. Borrowed from composition theorists, the new rhetoric, as it's called, has been a key element of genre analysis. Indeed, in his pioneering 1990 book on genre John Swales

pointed to the rhetorical theory of American composition theorist Carolyn Miller, who argues that ‘a rhetorically sound definition of genre must be centered not on the substance or form of discourse but on the action it is used to accomplish’ (Miller, 1984: 151). As Vijay Bhatia puts it,

[Genre is] a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purposes(s) identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs. Most often it is highly structured and conventionalized with constraints on allowable contributions in terms of their intent, positioning, form and functional value. These constraints, however, are often exploited by the expert members of the discourse community to achieve private intentions within the framework of socially recognized purpose(s). (Bhatia, 1993: 13)

Notice how this definition combines formal features and rhetorical variables such as *private intentions* and *socially recognized purposes*, and how different these rhetorical variables are from Selinker and Trimble’s conceptualization.

What distinguishes both the new rhetoric and genre analysis from their structuralist forebears is a concern for the *larger context* of the communicative situation. This larger context includes the situational exigence (or issue that motivates the communication), the presumed audience, the ethos or persona of the communicator, and the genre knowledge of the communicator (Gill & Whedbee, 1997). Within this context, the communicator applies certain strategies to carry out his or her rhetorical purpose.

In our 1995 book, Carol Berkenkotter and I incorporated these rhetorical features into our sociocognitive theory of genre knowledge. Our five principles read as follows:

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- *Dynamism.* Genres are dynamic rhetorical forms that are developed from actors’ responses to recurrent situations and that serve to stabilize experience and give it coherence and meaning. Genres change over time in response to their users’ sociocognitive needs.
  - *Situatedness.* Our knowledge of genres is derived from and embedded in our participation in the communicative activities of daily and professional life. As such, genre knowledge is a form of ‘situated cognition’ that continues to develop as we participate in the activities of the ambient culture.

- *Form and Content.* Genre knowledge embraces both form and content, including a sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time.
- *Duality of Structure.* As we draw on genre rules to engage in professional activities, we *constitute* social structures (in professional, institutional, and organizational contexts) and simultaneously *reproduce* these structures.
- *Community Ownership.* Genre conventions signal a discourse community's norms, epistemology, ideology, and social ontology.

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Figure 2. Five principles of a sociocognitive theory of genre knowledge

[from Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995]

In any case, it should be clear that there has been a major shift over the past 20 years from what we might call 'traditional rhetoric', emphasizing text structure, to 'new rhetoric', emphasizing communicative strategies. Miller, Swales, Bhatia, Berkenkotter and Huckin, and Johns (1997) all represent this latter school of thought, and Hyland (2000) does too, for that matter. Where I think we might differ, to some degree, is in the matter of specificity that occupied the first part of this talk.

And here's my take on that. If genre knowledge is as rhetorically charged as we now see it to be, it would seem almost impossible for someone who is not both an insider in the field and an expert in language to *teach* the kind of knowledge that's needed, at least not in the narrow-angle mode. We LSP professionals are language experts but we're not technical insiders. Thus, as the wide-angle partisans have been saying ever since Hutchinson and Waters, we're not well equipped to *teach* genre knowledge in all of its complexity.

But this is not to say that our students can't *learn* it. Indeed, when LSP students are not sitting in our classrooms they are sitting in other classrooms absorbing knowledge about their chosen field and its discourse community. These students can bring this contextualized, insider knowledge to bear in their acquisition and use of genre knowledge. As Berkenkotter and I have noted in one of our principles, "genre knowledge is a form of 'situated cognition' that continues to develop as we participate in the activities of the ambient culture." It is *our students* who are 'participating in the activities of the ambient culture,' not us. It is *they* who are in the

best position to determine and deploy the genre knowledge they need. In short, *if specificity is defined not in terms of content per se but in terms of the learner and his or her needs*, as I mentioned earlier, then our best strategy in helping our students acquire genre knowledge is to sensitize them to the variables involved and then work with them in applying these variables to their own particular field.

It's this way of looking at specificity, I believe, that accounts for the successes I've had with my summer teaching in Holland and my service-learning courses at Utah. These students are all immersed in situations where 'their sense of what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular point in time,' to cite another principle from Berkenkotter and Huckin, is better than my own. They are thus empowered as learners in a way that would not happen if I were simply teaching them in top-down fashion.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, specificity must ultimately be supplied by the *student*, not by the teacher, for it is the student more than the LSP teacher who is in the process of becoming an insider and whose interests are best served by becoming an astute analyst of the specialist discourse. If control is lodged in the student, the right level of specificity is assured. The teacher's role should be that of facilitator, instructing students in analytic strategies, both rhetorical and textual. Facilitation can also occur through imaginative course design and curriculum design, including the use of peer sessions, team teaching, linked courses, and so on. In any case, vesting control in the hands of the student is truer to the guiding spirit of LSP than is the teacher-centered pedagogy that so dominates LSP teaching around the world, and I think we should always be looking for ways to make this happen.

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